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THE DUTCH REPUBLIC

How 1,5 million Dutch paved the way to European modernity

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PREFACE

This paper tries to explain how the Dutch Republic (1581 – 1795), home to about 1,5 million people at the time, paved the way to European modernity. Strategically located in between England, France and the Holy Roman Empire, the Low Countries evolved into the largest urbanized area above the Alps by the 15th century. The counties of Flanders (Bruges, Ghent, Ypres, ...) and Brabant (Antwerp, Brussels, Leuven, ...) had evolved into mayor industrial and cultural centres while smaller trading port-cities in the north flourished. All of this made it a very interesting region for many European powers and a key possession of the Spanish-Habsburg dynasty.

To understand how the northern part of this region could become independent and install what can be seen as the first (early) modern republic in the world, we will look at its history and its people. The Eighty Years' War, their relationship with the sea, ... It will not only explain the Dutch Golden Age, but also the cultural rupture between The Netherlands and Belgium nowadays as well as even the roots of the modern European Union.

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NOTES ON TERMINOLOGY

1. TERMINOLOGY OF THE LOW COUNTRIES

LOW COUNTRIES:

1. Collective term for the flat coastal Rhine–Meuse–Scheldt delta region. Comprises all provinces/countries/duchies ... in this region throughout history. Today: The Netherlands, Belgium and Luxemburg.

THE NETHERLANDS:

1. A synonym for Low Countries (comes from the Dutch word *Nederlanden*, meaning “low countries”).
2. The name of the current-day constitutional monarchy The Netherlands.
3. Burgundian ≈ : The low countries under the rule of the House of Valois-Burgundy (384–1482)
4. Habsburg ≈ : The low countries under the rule of the House of Habsburg (1482-1797). Often used to name the Seventeen Provinces under Habsburgian rule before the Dutch Revolt (1482-1581)
5. Spanish ≈ : The low countries under the rule of the Spanish branch of the House of Habsburg (1556–1714). Often used to name the low countries that were left under Spanish rule after the Dutch Revolt.
6. Austrian ≈ : The low countries under the rule of the Austrian branch of the Habsburgs (1714–1797).

SEVENTEEN PROVINCES:

1. The personal union of the Imperial states of the Habsburg Netherlands once all states (except for the Prince-Bishopric of Liège) had been conquered by Charles V.

THE REPUBLIC OF THE SEVEN NETHERLANDS:

1. The federal republic created in 1581 after the Dutch Revolt. Synonyms: Dutch Republic, United Provinces (of the Netherlands).

HOLLAND:

1. The most important province of the federal Dutch Republic. Often informally used today to indicate the currently existing constitutional monarchy The Netherlands.

DUTCH:

1. The Germanic language spoken (in the past and today) in most of the historic Netherlands (except for what is now known as the Belgian region of Wallonia). Many variations are spoken in the different provinces and there is a significant difference between the official Dutch spoken in the Netherlands and the current-day “Flemish” spoken in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium.
2. Something of, from, or related to the (historic or current) Netherlands.

FLANDERS (FLEMISH):

1. The county of Flanders with important cities as Ghent and Bruges between 862 and 1797.
2. The Dutch-speaking northern portion of Belgium which includes most of the historic County of Flanders, Brabant (without the southern French-speaking “Walloon-Brabant” and the Dutch “North-Brabant”) and Limburg.

2. DUTCH, FRENCH OR ENGLISH?

Names of people, institutions and cities are in this paper written in the most relevant language. If there is a good English translation, it is translated into English, with a French or Dutch translation in *italic*. Most institutions were known in French as this was, besides Latin, the official language for the intellect during the *Ancien Régime*¹. Initiatives by the people (*Beeldenstorm*, *hagenpreken*, *Geuzen*, ...) are written in Dutch.

¹ Used here as a substitute for the Early Modern Period.

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 16th century, Western Europe consisted of 4 major monarchies: England, France, Spain and Portugal (*see illus. I*). During the Renaissance, the feudal system lost much of its influence in these areas and the fiefs fell into the hands of a diminishing group of noble families through the process of inheritance. Central Europe was home to the Holy Roman Empire, a political alliance of secular and ecclesiastical areas directly or indirectly subject to the sovereignty of the Roman-German Emperor. It consisted of a large number of duchies, counties, principalities, dioceses, archdioceses and free imperial cities.

In 1519 **Charles V**, member of the House of Habsburg, became the new Roman Emperor. In addition, he was also Arch-duke of Austria, King of Spain (Castile and Aragon), and Duke of Burgundy (*see illus. II*). His dominions in Europe included a unified Spain (with its southern Italian kingdoms of Naples, Sicily, and Sardinia) and the Holy Roman Empire, extending from Germany to northern Italy with direct rule over the Austrian hereditary lands and the **Burgundian Low Countries**. The region of these Low Countries, which corresponds to the current Benelux (and small parts of Germany and France), consisted of several counties and duchies at the beginning of the 16th century. Many of these were unified in the 15th century under the rule of the House of Burgundy. The remaining counties and duchies would be conquered by Charles V and together they would form the "Seventeen Provinces".

At the end of the 14th century, the Modern Devotion emerged in the north-eastern part of this region. It was a spiritual movement within the medieval Church that emphasized the inner development of the individual. This movement spread throughout the Hanseatic world (in the Low Countries and the Baltic Sea area) during the 15th century and would create the breeding ground for Biblical humanism - following the example of the humanists of Italy - and the Reformation of Martin Luther.

This **Reformation** began in 1517, when Martin Luther published his Ninety-five Theses in response to the indulgences sale. Supported by Huldrych Zwingli (Switzerland), Johannes Calvin (France) and John Knox (Scotland), a movement was set in motion with the aim of reforming the Catholic Church from the inside. However, the Pope and other leaders within the Catholic Church were not convinced and tried to combat it with the **Counter-Reformation**, supported by Roman Catholic monarchs led by the young Emperor Charles V. This resulted in a rift between the Reformed and the Roman Catholics. Printing, among other things, ensured that, despite the resistance of the Roman Catholic monarchs, the supporters of the reformists grew rapidly. Political contradictions between European monarchs and nobles were fuelled by this polarization, which led to several religious wars and uprisings.

The ideas of the Reformation quickly and massively found support in the urbanized Southern Netherlands (via Tournai and Valenciennes to Flanders (Bruges, Ypres, Ghent) and Antwerp. In the Late Middle Ages, this area was flourishing of rich trading cities that received some humanistic influence from Northern Italy.

Calvinism had a large following here. Lutheranism, which was initially stronger in the north and especially the east of the Netherlands, was supplanted by it in the second half of the 16th century.

Following its Counter-Reformation, Charles V issued in 1550 the **Blood Plaque** in the Netherlands. This punished all printing, writing, distribution, and possession of heretical books and pictures, attending heretical meetings, preaching a contrary religion, and housing heretics with the death penalty and confiscation of all property. The local rulers in the Low Countries, the nobility and the city councils, remained predominantly Catholic, but stood for a much more moderate religious policy to prevent disturbances with the large Protestant minority. Especially in the (Northern) regions far from Brussels, which was since 1531 the center of government, the anti-heresy legislation was hardly implemented. This gave Protestantism the time to take root in society in regions as Holland and Friesland.

1 The formation of the Dutch Republic

1.1 The Habsburg Netherlands

1.1.1 Introduction

Between 1384 and 1482, the Dukes of Burgundy tried to recreate a “Middle Francia” between France and the Holy Roman Empire through marriage, inheritance, or redemption. The Dukes of Burgundy managed to unite most of the territories in the Netherlands in a personal union (*see illus. III*). When Mary of Burgundy died in 1482, the Burgundian Netherlands fell into the hands of her Habsburg son Philip I of Castile.

In 1515, Charles V, born in Ghent and son of Philip I, became the ruler of the Netherlands. With the exception of the Prince-Bishopric of Liège, he succeeded in bringing all 17 regions of the Low Countries under his rule in 1543, creating the Seventeen Provinces (*see illus. IV*). The actual administration of the Netherlands was done by his aunt Margaret of Austria (from 1506 to 1515 and from 1517 to 1530) and sister Mary of Hungary (from 1531 to 1555). Especially his aunt ruled with an iron fist and tended to ignore the local nobility. It helped Charles V to create a centrally administered unified state of the Netherlands. After the Peace of Augsburg, which stated that the ruler of the Roman area concerned could determine the religion, he abdicated and left the Spanish and Dutch territories to his son Philip II of Spain in 1555.

1.1.2 State structure

The Habsburg Netherlands never became a unitary state, but always remained a personal union of formally independent territories (*nl: landsheerlijkheid*). The unity initially consisted in the fact that they all had the same territorial lord of the house of the Habsburgs. Due to the vastness of Emperor Charles V's empire and his many obligations in other parts of his empire, he rarely resided in the Habsburg Netherlands. To replace him when he was absent, the function of governor-general (*nl: Voogd*) was created. They were generally a close relative of the lord and resided in either Brussels, which became the capital of the Habsburg Netherlands, or Mechelen. In an attempt to centralize power, Charles V created three government councils (*fr: les Conseils Collatéraux*) to advise the governor-general (*see illus. V*): the Council of State (*fr: le Conseil d'État*), the Privy Council (*fr: le Conseil Privé*) and the Council of Finance (*fr: le Conseil des Finances*). The governor-general was formally head of these councils.

In theory, the **Council of State** was the most important governmental council. This administrative body consisted of twelve high nobles appointed by the lord himself. It focused on “the most important matters and everything concerning the state of affairs (especially foreign affairs), the government, the security and the defense of the Low Countries.” However, the Council was convened less and less often under Philip II. Governor Margaret of Parma only asked advice from three members of the council, the so-called *consulta*. High nobles such as William the Silent and the Count of Egmond therefore refused after some time to attend the meetings of the Council and resigned in 1567. When the Duke of Alva became Governor in the same year, the Council of State lost all influence.

In practice, the real influence of the **Privy Council** on affairs of state was much greater. The council consisted of six to nine jurists who were to provide advice to the governor (or to arrange administration on his behalf) in the area of justice and home affairs (legislation and administration). Daily meetings were held under the leadership of the governor to draft texts for central laws and regulations and to monitor compliance with them. The Governor consulted this council for granting privileges or for requests for clemency. This council also supervised the work of provincial and local institutions and made proposals for the appointment of officials.

The already existing **Great Council of the Netherlands at Mechelen** was still the highest court. However, since the division of powers did not exist, the step towards the administration of justice by the Privy Council was only a small one. In theory, the Privy Council acted as an exception court and its judicial power was strictly limited by various instructive texts. The judgments of the Grand Council as well as the judgments of the so-called sovereign courts of justice (Council of Brabant, Council of Hainaut, Parliament of Dole) could be reviewed by the Privy Council only if there were procedural errors. However, such errors were soon pretended to such an extent that revision became a covert appeal. By means of the evocation, the Privy Council could, on its own initiative or at the request of one of the parties, withdraw cases from any lower court and deal with them in whole or in part.

In addition to managing the monarch's domains, the **Council of Finance** was also involved in preparing the monarch's requests for prayer and collecting the pledged funds. The Council also audited lower financial bodies in the provinces. At the local level, the lord was represented by a stadtholder, who was in charge of the regional administrative bodies on his behalf. He had access to the States General (*Staten-Generaal*), the meeting of the representatives of each "Regional States" (*Staten-Provinciaal*) organized by the lord. The Regional States was a local meeting of the representatives of each class (clergy, nobility, and bourgeoisie) held in each province.

1.1.3 The Dutch revolt

The religious contradictions exposed the constitutional problem: did the Catholic king have absolute power, or did he have to cooperate with the high nobility and the States General? The stadtholders (*nl: stadhouder*) and the high nobility had to give up much of their power under Charles V for the benefit of official jurists. Philip II's governor, Margaret of Parma, went even further: she was only advised by a few confidants, including Cardinal Granvelle. The normally so influential high nobles from the Council of State, such as **William the Silent** and **Lamoral of Egmont**, saw their power curtailed. They were dissatisfied with the policy of increasing centralization and against the strict approach to Protestants, as it caused a lot of unrest in the regions. Granvelle was held responsible for this policy and in 1561, the high nobles united to get the cardinal away - which they succeeded in 1564.

Besides the high nobles, the low nobles, among whom were followers of Calvinism, were also dissatisfied. They, too, did not agree with the policy pursued: the persecution of Protestants and the increasing bureaucracy and centralization. They united themselves in the Compromise of Nobles (*fr: Compromis des Nobles*) and through a petition (*nl: Eedschrift der Edelen*), signed by a few hundred nobles and presented to the governor, they pleaded for the abolition of persecution against Calvinists. Margaret suspended the prosecution while waiting for a response from Philip II of Spain. Calvinists, who previously met secretly, now began to manifest themselves openly.

There were also major economic problems. The Spanish national debt increased tenfold between 1552 and 1556. That is why Philip II suspended interest payments in 1557: it was the first of a series of Spanish state bankruptcies that resulted in the ruin of the South German bankers and Antwerp small savers. An English blockade of wool imports from the kingdom of England (as a result of the Anglo-Spanish trade war) resulted in enormous unemployment in Flanders and Artois in 1563 in the important cloth industry (*nl: lakennijverheid*). The harsh winter of 1564 resulted in a disappointing harvest in the Seventeen Provinces. The following year, a conflict in the Baltic Sea between Denmark and Sweden led to an increase in grain prices. As a result, a famine broke out in the Seventeen Provinces during the winters of 1565 and 1566. This economic malaise caused much of the population to dislike Catholic indulgences even more. In addition, the rising bourgeoisie, without necessarily being interested in a religious reform, saw in Calvinism an opportunity to break free from the old, established authority.

The harsh approach of Protestants, the increasing centralization, bureaucratization and the economic decline among parts of the population caused increasing discontent and unrest in the Seventeen Provinces.

1.1.4 The *Beeldenstorm* (iconoclastic attacks)

On April 5th, 1566, Margaret received the first *Eedschrift der Edelen* asking for the abolition of the Inquisition. She suspended the activities of the Inquisition so that the nobles were given time to collect signatures and to submit the petition directly to Philip II in Spain. How small the chance of Philip's acceptance was, however, has never been tested in practice: many saw the suspension as if the governor had agreed that everyone could now live freely according to their own convictions. Attracted by this new situation, many exiles (especially from London and Emden) returned to the Seventeen Provinces. Lutheran and Calvinist preachers ventured after April 1566 to public, open-air sermons to convince the people in the cities of the new faith. These sermons were called *Hagenpreken* (= Hedge Preachings, as they were held in the dunes and bushes near town) and became increasingly successful. The measures that the governor imposed against these meetings and exiles were not successful, on the contrary.

Strengthened by the success of their sermons and convinced that it was permitted by the governor, the Protestants even claimed the right to preach in some churches within the city walls in early August 1566. There was a constant tension between what was possible according to the Protestants (to freely profess their faith: preaching within the city walls, administering the sacraments, etc.) and what was actually permitted (none of that). In Steenvoorde, the protestant preach Sebastiaan Matte held a *Hagenpreek* on August 10th, 1566. At the end of this sermon, the excited audience entered a nearby chapel and smashed the religious statues to pieces. It would be the beginning of the *Beeldenstorm*, in which statues of saints and other objects from Catholic religious sites were destroyed on a large scale by Protestants. First in the Westhoek (with Steenvoorde as its epicentre), where itinerant groups in various cities and municipalities caused religious destruction. Sometimes, the groups received help from local residents. Preachers sometimes gave a sermon first, the local authorities hardly dared to intervene.

The violence shifted to the Scheldt area and thus spread to the North (*see illus. VI*). On 20 and 22 August, it was respectively Antwerp's and Ghent's turn. The last one suffered the greatest damage: the iconoclasts destroyed and raided seven parish churches, one collegiate church, twenty-five monasteries, ten hospitals and seven chapels within 24 hours.² The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb, the altarpiece of the St. Bavo's Cathedral painted 100 years earlier by the Van Eyck brothers, was saved in time by hiding it in the tower.³ The altarpiece, which inspired many Italian Renaissance painters, is considered a masterpiece of European art and one of the world's treasures. Only 12 days after the incident in Steenvoorde, the *Beeldenstorm* also reached the northern provinces. In barely 20 days, the violence spread across Flanders, Artois, Brabant, Holland, Zeeland and Utrecht. In September and October, the Northern and Eastern Netherlands followed, where the local population, together with some nobles, stormed churches in Leeuwarden and Groningen.

William the Silent and his supporters, including the high nobles Egmont and Horne, condemned the violence. They envisioned a moderate policy and religious freedom in the Seventeen Provinces. The support of moderate Catholics for the idea of religious freedom was threatened by the iconoclasts. William the Silent and his supporters promised to Margaret to restore peace in exchange for allowing Protestantism in areas where it existed before the *Beeldenstorm*. Margaret had no choice but to agree.

² Deliberation of the magistrate on the report of the deputies, November 10, 1566: *Doc. 1566-1579*, f° 164r°-164v°.

³ VISIT GENT, *The adventures of the Ghent Altarpiece: Six centuries of history*, internet, (consulted on 20 November 2020), (<https://visit.gent.be/en/adventures-ghent-altarpiece>).

1.2 The beginning of the 80 years war

1.2.1 The Army of Flanders and the *Geuzen*

Philip II was shocked and offended when he heard of the *Beeldenstorm*. To restore peace with an iron fist, he sent Fernando Álvarez de Toledo y Pimentel, third Duke of **Alba**, to the Netherlands with 3 assignments: Establishing new Dutch dioceses, implementing the counter-reformation decisions of the Council of Trent and punishing the Iconoclasts. He arrived in Brussels on August 22nd, 1567 with an infantry of 8000 soldiers and a Cavalry of 1200⁴, sent from Northern Italy via a sequence of friendly or neutral territories, which would become known as the 'Spanish Road' (*see illus. VII*). When they arrived in the Netherlands, they joined the 10,000 Walloon and German troops already serving Margaret of Parma, who then resigned as governor-general in favour of Alba. The new Spanish troops were difficult to work with, but formed an essential professional basis for this new **Army of Flanders**. Backed by this army and his newly established Council of Troubles (*fr: Conseil des Troubles*), Alba began clamping down on the unrest. He tried around 12,000 people: he condemned 1,000 to death while others were forfeited property⁵. Van Egmont and Horne were sentenced to death for high treason because they had not been tough (enough) on the protestants. Willem the Silent was sentenced to death in absentia as he had fled to Germany.

Filip II's opponents called themselves **Geuzen**. It was the Dutchified version of *les Gueux*, which is French for "Beggars". With the words "*N'ayez pas peur Madame, ce ne sont que des gueux*" ("Do not be afraid, madam, they are only beggars") Charles de Berlaymont, councilor of Margaret, is said to have referred to the low nobles in 1566 who signed the *Eedschrift der Edelen* petition. Three days later, one of those nobles, Hendrik van Brederode, raised the following words during a banquet: "*J'ai bu à la santé des Gueux! Vive le Gueux!*" ("I drank to the health of the Beggars! Long live the Beggar!"). The original league of *Geuzen* was short-lived, crushed by Alba, but its principles survived and were to be ultimately triumphant.

1.2.2 The Battle of Heiligerlee

The deaths of Egmont and Horne had made William the Silent the undisputed leader of the Dutch Revolt. He wanted to engage in armed resistance because he believed in freedom of religion for the Dutch. In 1568, he devised a risky plan to invade the Netherlands from three sides with a mercenary army, and the help of other nobles (*see illus. VIII*). They would invade the centre with the battle of Dalheim on April 25th, the North with the battle of Heiligerlee on May 23rd and the south with the battle of Galdenaken on October 20th. The only victory, the one at Heiligerlee, was nullified on July 21st with the crushing defeat at Jemmingen. Although the invasion was a failure, the victory at Heiligerlee is still seen as the beginning of the 80 Years War, or the Dutch War of Independence, as it's the first protestant success against their catholic ruler.

TRIVIA | Not long after the first invasion of William the Silent, the *Wilhelmus* was written. It's a *Geuzen* song describing some of the events of the invasion. It is written as if the text is being sung by William the Silent himself, also considered as "the Father of the Fatherlanders" (*nl: Vader der Vaderlanders*) by the contemporary Dutch people. The Netherlands have made this song their official national anthem in 1932.

Due to the defeat of William the Silent, Philip II seemed to have won from the insurgents. The insurgents were from now on doomed to attack and defend with pen and paper (through propaganda). Between 1567 and 1573, some 50,000 people fled (mainly from the Southern Netherlands) to England or Germany, while many Catholics left the Northern Netherlands.

⁴ PARKER G., *The Dutch Revolt*, London: Pelican Books, 1979, (p. 89).

⁵ ZAGORIN, P., *Rebels and Rulers, 1500–1660. Volume II: Provincial rebellion: Revolutionary civil wars, 1560–1660*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, (p. 98).

1.2.3 The insurgents gain a foothold thanks to the *Geuzen*

After his defeat, William the Silent, who had now openly placed himself at the head of the party of revolt, granted in 1569 *letters of marque*⁶ to a number of vessels manned by the *Watergeuzen*. These were (mostly convicted) insurgents who had fled the policies of Philip II in the years before and who had an excellent knowledge of the sea. They plundered ships and small coastal cities and carried their booty to the English ports where they were able to refit and replenish their stores. Even though they acted like pirates, they had some international status as some of them were officially the navy of William the Silent. Apart from areas in Germany (his family's castle was in Dillenburg), William also had a small principality in France. That piece of land inherited from his nephew gave him the legal right to run his own navy.

The intention was to strike The Netherlands in the summer of 1572 on four fronts at once (*see illus. IX*): there would be an invasion from the south by William's brother, Louis of Nassau, with the support of the French Protestants (the Huguenots). The *Watergeuzen* would invade the coast of North Holland from the sea, William would go to Brabant and his brother-in-law would take Guelders.

Philip II convinced Queen Elizabeth to expel the *Watergeuzen* from the English ports, leaving them to look for a new base, possessions, and food. On April 1st, 1572, they invaded Brielle in South Holland, possibly unprepared and out of necessity in search of food. There were no Spanish soldiers and Philip II didn't make a big deal of losing Brielle. However, encouraged by this success, the *Watergeuzen* sailed to Vlissingen, which was also taken by a *coup de main*. The capture of these two towns prompted several nearby towns to declare for revolt, starting a chain reaction that resulted in the majority of Holland joining in a general revolt of the Netherlands. From then on, William the Silent launched his plan and conquered, together with the *Geuzen* and his family, many cities all over the Netherlands in just a few months.

Guido Marnef, author of *"Protestant conversions in an age of Catholic Reformation: the case of sixteenth-century Antwerp"*, points in his research repeatedly to the fact that many people are not compartmentalizable in the religious field. He is talking about the middle groups, the so-called *Protestant Catholics*. These people did not belong to any particular confession. They disagreed with a number of Catholic standpoints, but at the same time were unwilling to let go of the Catholic Church. Thus, as the political situation changed, this group could lean to either religious extreme. That's what happened during the miracle year of 1566, when many Protestant Catholics listened to the Calvinist sermons. However, when the tide turned and the government intensified persecution once again, they quickly renounced their old errors. These people agreed with the criticism of the Protestants and therefore supported the Protestant cause but reconciled again with the Catholic Church after the repression of Alba.

1.2.4 Alba's crackdown

To restore order and punish the rebellious cities, Alba appointed his son Don Frederik to organize a punitive expedition against the rebellious cities (*see illus X*). With his army of Flanders, that had been reinforced and now counted 67.259 soldiers⁷, he arrived in Mechelen on October 2nd, 1572. The day before, the Protestant occupiers, followed by several thousand civilians, had fled the city. When Don Frederik arrived, the Spanish-minded Malinois opened the gate for him. Nevertheless, he didn't spare the city: Alba wanted to set an example for other rebellious cities and ordered his army to brutally sack the city. The Spaniards indulged themselves in murders, looting and other atrocities, which went down in history as the Spanish Fury at Mechelen. This violence caused so much fear that other rebellious cities in Flanders and Brabant gave up their resistance. In one fell swoop, authority was restored in these regions. After this, it was Zutphen's turn. This city was taken on November 16th and also brutally sacked. This time too, other cities in Gelderland, Overijssel, and Friesland stopped their resistance.

⁶ These were licenses that authorized a privateer to attack and capture vessels of a nation at war with the issuer.

⁷ G. Parker, *The army of Flanders and the Spanish Road, 1567-1659*, Cambridge, 1972 (p. 271).

1.2.5 The Pacification of Ghent

At this point, the revolt only raged in Zeeland and Holland, where Protestantism had already taken root more deeply and had set in motion the change of institutions. Many exiles had returned, Catholic churches had gone to the Protestants, and city councils (*nl: vroedschappen*) had been purged. Surrendering to Don Frederik was no longer an option. Although Spain could not get a grip on the *Watergeuzen*, the Spanish army on land still proved supreme. By means of inundations, the insurgents managed to survive in these areas. The Spaniards did achieve an important victory in Zeeland with the capture of Zierikzee in October 1575.

Immediately after the capture, the Spanish soldiers claimed the remainder of their wages, which had not been fully paid for two years. However, due to the bankruptcy of Castile in 1575, Philip II had reduced the money transfers to the Netherlands, so the government in Brussels was not able to meet this requirement. The consequences were catastrophic: the Spanish troops left the newly conquered Zierikzee and mutinied. They moved south and looted everything and everyone they encountered. These goods were then redeemed in Antwerp and Bergen op Zoom. When there was nothing more to be looted, the entire Spanish army then moved to Brabant, so that the occupation of Zierikzee was lifted after a year.

Because the army turned against the loyal provinces in search of money, the hatred against the Spaniards flared up. In Brussels, the mutineers were fought by armed civilians that made them set course for Aalst, 30 kilometres to the east, on July 25th, 1576. The city was looted, civilians were murdered and raped. Until November 2nd, this would be the headquarters of the mutineers while they plundered the area between Brussels and Ghent. Afterwards, they went to Antwerp, where they made 7000 to 18000 victims⁸.

Despite the "religion issues" between the insurgents and royalists, everyone agreed that the violent Spanish mutineers had to leave. Under the pressure of the people, shocked by the Spanish violence, the royalist States General united with the 2 rebellious provinces (Holland and Zeeland) in the Union of Brussels (*see illus. XI*) and concluded an agreement: the Pacification of Ghent, which stated that...

- ... the Spanish troops had to leave the Netherlands.
- ... the States General could come together on their own initiative (without approval of the governor).
- ... there had to be an amnesty for the insurgents.
- ... the old privileges of the secular and ecclesiastical authorities had to be restored.
- ... the Dutch nobles should be responsible for the administration of the Netherlands instead of Spaniards.
- ... William the Silent was to act as the head of government in the Netherlands alongside the governor.

⁸ Nolan, Cathal (2006). *The Age of Wars of Religion, 1000-1650: Encyclopedia of Global Warfare and Civilization, Volume 2*, Greenwood Publishing Group. p. 799.
Ireland: 1641: *Contexts and Reactions*. Oxford University Press. 2013. p. 179.

1.2.6 The Union of Utrecht

On February 12, 1577, the new governor and half-brother of Philip II, Don Juan of Austria, made an agreement with the Union of Brussels: the Perpetual Edict (*nl: Eeuwig Edict*). In this agreement, he accepted the requirements of the Pacification of Ghent. However, the provinces recognized Philip II as king and Don Juan as governor (the States General would no longer meet on their own initiative) and the Catholic faith would be maintained (Protestantism would be banned). This agreement was unacceptable to William the Silent and the States of Zeeland and Holland and thus they refused to recognize Don Juan as the governor.

Only 3 months after Philip II ratified the Edict, Don Juan recalled the Spanish army and occupied the citadel of Namur. This occupation was a violation of the Edict, whereby the States General appointed on their own a new governor: Matthias of Austria, a brother-in-law of Philip II. William the Silent became his lieutenant. As a result, the whole Union of Brussels revolted against the king for the first time. In response, Philip II ordered Don Juan to retake the Netherlands with the returned Spanish troops. Spain soon regained power in the southeast of the Netherlands (*see illus. XII*).

William the Silent tried to maintain unity between the provinces, but faced an impossible task. The religious freedom he stood for was not granted to Catholics by radical Calvinists. Where they seized power, the city councils were purged of Catholics, Catholic churches were closed and the clergy exiled. For moderate Catholics, this was a true spectre. They saw that religious peace posed a threat to Catholicism in this way. The willingness to contribute financially to a joint defence was therefore small, which made it impossible for the States General to set up a powerful military. Fearful of the radical elements of the Revolt, the French-speaking regions of Artois and Hainaut, together with the French-speaking cities of Lille, Douai and, Orchies in Walloon Flanders, re-joined Spain on January 6, 1579, through the Union of Arras (*see illus. XIII*).

Under the leadership of Alexander Farnese, who succeeded Don Juan as governor on October 1, 1578, the Spanish troops moved more and more northward. As a result, a military alliance was established in the north on January 23, 1579, under the leadership of William the Silent and Holland and Zeeland: the Union of Utrecht. The Union of Brussels was now divided in two: the rebellious North in the Union of Utrecht and the Royalist South in the Union of Arras (*see illus. XIII*). Philip II's goal, who would not allow any freedom of religion, was to recapture the north.

1.2.7 The proclamation of the Dutch Republic

In August, 1579 Willem the Silent narrowly escaped capture by Spanish troops during the battle of Baasrode, near Antwerp. On March 15, 1580, the king signed an outlawry against the Willem the Silent. On July 26th, 1581, the States-General formally renounced Philip II as king in the Act of Abjuration (*nl: Plakkaat van Verklatinghe*). In practice, this act was a declaration of independence because it was the first time that people explicitly revolted against the king. Previously, it was always said that the provinces would remain loyal to the king, if traditional freedoms and privileges of the provinces were restored.

After the signing, the States General went in search of another monarch. Attempts to enthrone the French King Henry II, Duke of Anjou, William the Silent (who was assassinated in 1584), Queen Elizabeth I of England or Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, all failed. Ultimately, the remaining areas of the Union of Utrecht (*see illus. XIV*) agreed on the Deduction of Vrancken and formally established the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands in 1588, 20 years after the Battle of Heiligerlee.

While these first 20 years might be seen as a messy and poorly organized revolt, the creation of the republic made it a war between 2 countries: The Seven United Netherlands and Spain. This confederal republic would largely conquer the Northern Netherlands (Drenthe and Groningen) from 1590.

2 The modernization of the Dutch Republic (*The Dutch Golden Age*)

2.1 Introduction of the Dutch Golden Age

The Dutch Republic established a constitutional state with no absolute power ruler. Most government functions in this confederation remained with the provincial states, which consisted of Clergy, Bourgeoisie and Nobles. Although there were other (confederal) republics in Europe (the Old Swiss Confederacy for example), the Dutch were the wealthiest, most successful, and most important in international diplomacy and culture. The Dutch prosperity was contributed to by achievements in art, science, literature, mathematics, and philosophy. The religious tolerance of the Dutch was unique in Europe, which attracted a lot of foreign capital and investment. Their trading business excelled due to their large number of ships and knowledge of the sea, allowing them to establish a global trade empire. The Dutch establishment of the Bank of Amsterdam created an international measure of value for money, leading to Amsterdam becoming the financial centre of Europe. Their successes in economy, politics, and scientific and cultural achievements made the Dutch a secure, relatively unified, and highly prosperous republic.

2.2 Urbanization

2.2.1 An urbanized country

The Dutch Republic emerged in a region of Europe where urbanization had already reached remarkably high levels. By 1550, the Low countries (especially the southern counties of Flanders and Brabant) were the most urbanized region in Europe. By 1550, the Brabantian port city of Antwerp had become the second largest city north of the Alps, and the financial and trading capital of the world. The bourse of Antwerp, founded before stocks and shares existed, was the world's first purpose-built commodity exchange. Also Brussels, which Charles V considered the centre of his “empire on which the sun never sets”, Bruges and Ghent were equally substantial by the standards of the era. The Dutch revolt shifted the emphasis from the south to the north. By 1600, the percentages of urbanities in the north had overtaken that of the south: possibly as many as 100,000 people, mostly from urban environments, had exchanged the south for the north. The populations of towns such as Haarlem and Leiden consisted of possibly 50 percent immigrants from Brabant and Flanders. The urban population in Holland, which dominated the Dutch Republic and its Golden Age, counted over half a million people in 1650. In comparison, the largest European cities at the time, Paris and London, counted respectively 400.000 and 430.000 habitants.

2.2.2 An urban economy and lifestyle

The impact of the towns was visible everywhere. Over 80 percent of Holland's economy in the seventeenth century comprised trade and industry. Due to the high levels of urbanization, farming had gone through a process of commercialization and specialization that made it one of the most productive agriculture in the world. One of these agricultural activities was growing tulips, which arrived where introduced in Europe via the port of Antwerp in 1562. Four hundred years later, The Netherlands remains the dominant producer of flowers, with as much as 50% of the world market. Thanks to the strong linkage between sectors (a feature of the Golden Age), the producers of Delftware⁹ started designing special vases that presented the flowers in the most favourable manner.

Both trade and industry, concentrated in the towns, were experiencing inter-connected changes because of the rise in international and especially inter-continental trade. In the 1590s, the first successful trips to East Asia had been launched from various ports in Holland and Zeeland. Imports were processed in Holland, think of the sugar industry or the production of various dyes made from Brazil wood. Trade in return required ships, which were mass produced on shipyards along the Zaan river, north of Amsterdam, serviced by sawmills propelled by wind energy.

⁹ Delftware (= Dutch porcelain) was a result of a temporary interruption of Chinese porcelain, made in Delft. It continued to serve a niche market even when the Chinese original started to become available again in the 1680s.

The growth of Holland's towns created a huge demand for housing. Completely new neighbourhoods were built as a result. The Amsterdam council decided to increase the size of the town substantially in 1609 and during the 1660s. These expansions required the demolition of the ramparts and the building of new defence works further out¹⁰. Speculators, included quite a few members of the town council who had been aware of the plans from their initial stages, made fortunes from buying up land ahead of the publication of the plans. The process of designing and executing the projects was largely left to the market, simply because the local government lacked the financial and bureaucratic resources to execute a project of this magnitude.

Also Leiden, which became one of Europe's most significant textile centres mainly due to a massive influx of Flemish immigrants, almost doubled in size as a result of additional industrial districts built to the north and east of the old city. Other towns that were substantially expanded in the first half of the seventeenth century included Alkmaar, The Hague, Dordrecht, Medemblik, Monnickendam, Rotterdam, and outside Holland Groningen, Vlissingen, and Zwolle. The expansion of urban housing provided a massive boost to the local building industries. Between roughly 1580 and 1630, the housing stock in Holland almost trebled. Houses became more sophisticated, with separate rooms for designated activities, such as cooking, sleeping, reception, and work. This process had started before 1600 but accelerated due to the extensive building activities.

Expanding towns also required new gate buildings and other facilities. During the seventeenth century, nine towns built a new town hall, while seven others executed major renovations and rebuilding. The new town hall for Amsterdam was to be the largest public building erected in seventeenth-century Europe.

2.2.3 An urban culture

Urbanization had a significant impact on publishing and literacy. In the early modern period, literacy rates were mainly determined by two factors: Protestantism and the percentage of urbanites in the population. Protestantism encouraged its believers to personally familiarize themselves with the holy message by reading the Bible. The most significant publishing project in the young Dutch Republic was the official translation into Dutch of the Bible, commissioned by the Synod of Dordt in 1618. It happened at a time when the Dutch language was still unsettled, trying to distinguish itself from the Low German from which it originated. Literary authors and the committee producing the new Bible translation were simultaneously working out the grammar and vocabulary. It took the committee almost twenty years to finish the project, but the result became the single most important text of the Dutch Republic. Any family owning books would at the least own a Bible, and those adhering to the Dutch Reformed Church (about half the population) would read from it on a daily basis. Literacy rates were high in towns, because that is where educational facilities - public schools, private schoolmasters, guild apprenticeships - were concentrated.

Another indication of the high literacy rates was the rapid rise of the publishing industry in the Dutch Republic. Low Countries publishing was concentrated in the south, especially Antwerp, but as in so many other areas, the Revolt and the Fall of Antwerp were to prove a turning point. By 1610, the number of Dutch towns with a bookshop had tripled to twenty-four, and the number of publishers in the Dutch Republic had easily passed the one hundred mark. Much of their output was published in Dutch, for the domestic market. During the seventeenth century, Dutch publishers together published an estimated 100,000 titles. During the second half of the century, increasing numbers of those titles were also exported.

Amongst the many innovations developed by Dutch urban publishers was the newspaper. The first newspapers appeared in the German lands, as the printed successors to merchants' newsletters about foreign developments that might impact on trade. By the middle of the century, Amsterdam had become the news capital of the world, while other towns of Holland were not far behind. News bulletins, mostly of a single sheet, were published in Dutch, French, and English. The business developed to such an extent that some publisher could afford to specialize entirely in the production of newspapers.

¹⁰ STADSARCHIEF AMSTERDAM - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvsvHvfs3G1M&feature=emb_title

2.2.4 Urban institutions

Urban institutions shaped the Dutch Republic on all levels of its society. The Dutch Republic was not so much a single country as a 'confederacy of seven sovereign provinces'. In order to really discover the nature of their government, it must be taken yet into smaller pieces, by which it will appear that each of these provinces is likewise composed of many little states or cities, which have several marks of sovereign power within themselves, and are not subject to the sovereignty of their province.

The country as a whole was dominated by the province of Holland, which paid almost 60% of the Union's revenue and shouldered over 90% of its debts. The States of Holland, in turn, were dominated by its eighteen enfranchised towns, for which the single vote of the nobility offered precious little balance. Towns themselves were governed under two distinct models. In the coastal provinces, permanent councils with members serving for life administered local services and covered provincial and national politics. In practice, a lot of the day-to-day business was left to two or four burgomasters, who were elected for one or two years only, but returned after a short waiting period. In Amsterdam the burgomasters who were temporarily out of office still participated in an informal council of 'former burgomasters' who were in effect more powerful than the council. In the eastern provinces of Overijssel and Gelderland, all members of the council had to be elected every year, and they were also controlled by so-called common councils, representing the guilds, militias, neighbourhoods, or a combination thereof.

Informal talks and negotiations took place between town hall and civic organizations, which covered many areas of urban life. Some organizations were voluntary, others compulsory; some of them accessible only to those inhabitants with formal citizenship rights, others to all inhabitants; some quite small, others with hundreds of members. Two of the best-known, most generally available, and largest in terms of membership were the guilds and civic militias.

The guilds were responsible for the organization of many domains of economic life. The most notable exception was trade, which in Holland was largely unregulated. Joining a guild was compulsory for those who wanted to exercise the trade as an independent master; journeymen were not normally accepted as members. To join a guild, it was necessary to acquire formal citizen status in one's town of residence. The number of guilds increased significantly during the seventeenth century, suggesting that at least they did not prevent economic prosperity. In the creative industries, we actually see a close coincidence between the blossoming of the arts and the multiplication of guilds. Members of guilds maintained social insurance for fellow members and held annual dinners. In Utrecht and Dordrecht they could even be buried together in the guild grave.

Civic militias had long been organized along the lines of the guild model, but were transformed during the Dutch Revolt into much more open organizations with compulsory memberships, irrespective of formal citizen status, of adult men. Their task was to help defend the town in times of emergency and participate in the night watch about once a month.

TRIVIA | The militias in the towns of Holland commissioned collective portraits, in which the officers of the company had themselves portrayed for posterity. These pictures were displayed in the militia halls. The most famous was *The Night Watch* by Rembrandt, a 1642 portrait of the company of Frans Banning Cocq (*see illus. XX*).

2.2.5 Conclusion

It was no coincidence that most of the things we associate with the Dutch Golden Age – economic prosperity, religious toleration, cultural blossoming – were also primarily features of Holland’s heavily urbanized society and less in evidence with the other (more rural) parts of the country. Those other provinces depended in many ways – economically, militarily, culturally – on Holland’s success.

Even though there were more urban regions in the world (Home Counties of southeast-England, Yangzi delta around Shanghai), Holland had the advantage of being backed up by a powerful state. The other provinces of the Dutch Republic had an important role as suppliers of manpower for Holland’s fleet and industries and as a military buffer zone.

2.3 Water and Land

2.3.1 The relationship between the Dutch and water

The “Low Countries” is a coastal lowland region forming the lower basin of the Rhine–Meuse–Scheldt delta. Their estuaries, which have largely been widened by tides, were located in the provinces of Zeeland and Holland. Most river branches did not end directly into the open sea, but filled the swampy lagoon behind the Dutch beach ridge. The Rhine branches IJssel and Vecht developed small deltas in the former Zuiderzee. Defence against the sea has thus been a major theme in the history of the Netherlands from the earliest times – and continues to be up to the present. The task of controlling the abuna water inside the sea dykes has remained an inescapable reality of Dutch life, in part because of the volume of water brought into the region by the Rhine and the other great rivers. Yet, the relationship between water and land should nor be seen simply as a struggle between the two elements; water may have been a potential enemy, but it also brought vital benefits for the inhabitants of the Northern Netherlands. In the seventeenth century in particular, Dutch economic success was intimately tied to the advantages provided not only by easy access to the sea, but also by the transport infrastructure facilitated by rivers and canals.

The Dutch economy was first and foremost based on trade, which depended on the sea together with the canal and river routes that gave Dutch traders access to a large continental hinterland. The important shipping of grain from the Baltic ports (for Dutch consumption and for re-export) was a bulk trade, carried in Dutch ships manned by Dutch sailors. The North Sea was also a vital Dutch resource: not only were herring and cod important sources of food for the Dutch people, but fishing for them also employed at its peak in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries around 500 boats and gave jobs to a commensurate number of fishermen.

Canals, rivers, and lakes provided the Northern Netherlands with a dense transport network that made communications in general and the movement of goods in particular relatively easy and efficient. Whereas in most of Europe poor or non-existent roads made travel and the transport of goods slow and expensive, almost the whole of the Republic was accessible by water in one way or another. In the course of a few decades from the 1630s onwards, a network of *trekvaarten* was constructed. These were dedicated canals for towed passenger barges, operating on regular schedules, and covering much of the country. These became rapidly so much an accepted part of Dutch life that imagined arguments between passengers on such barges became a com trope of the pamphlet literature of the time.

2.3.2 The transformation of the landscape

By the late sixteenth century much of the land in the maritime provinces of the nascent Dutch Republic had been reclaimed or drained during the course of centuries and needed constant protection from the sea (*see illus. XXI*). The land in the polders drained between 1300 and 1500 had sunken considerably over time and the floods of the early sixteenth century seemed to suggest that the fight was being lost. However, this process of slow gains and sudden losses turned from the late sixteenth century onwards into a half-century of large-scale reclamation and drainage projects that transformed the landscape of the maritime region, most notably in Holland and Zeeland (*see illus. XXI*).

From the late sixteenth century, for a number of economic and demographic reasons, prices for a wide variety of foodstuffs rose throughout Europe, providing a favourable market for Dutch dairy and beef farmers. This positive conjuncture encouraged investment in the agricultural sector and specifically in drainage projects. Between 1610 and 1630, some ten million guilders (160 million euros as of 2018) were poured by Amsterdam investors alone into drainage schemes in north Holland.² By the 1640s, Holland had grown by almost a third: the region had been transformed into a solid landmass, with only a few small lakes, with these not directly connected to the sea. Important is the reclamation of the Beemster in 1612. In Zeeland (meaning “Sealand” in Dutch), which was mostly drained in the preceding centuries, a vast area of land was reclaimed in the new *Staats-Vlaanderen* province, taken from the Spanish at the end of the eighty Years War. The end result of this whole process was a dramatic increase in the area of farmland in the maritime region. However, this landscape transformation was not without its difficulties and drawbacks: the new polders narrowed the possibilities for transport by water to a certain extent (some towns in Holland lost their former waterway connections for example) and the inland fisheries suffered.

Although the availability of capital to invest combined with the lure of high agricultural prices made the drainage schemes both possible and desirable, they could not have succeeded as they did without vital technological changes. The older system of drainage – opening sluices at low tide and closing them at high – was no longer sufficient for the challenge presented by the new drainage schemes. The water had to be pumped out of the new polders, and it was the famous Dutch windmills that supplied the power for these pumps. By linking a series of mills together (*the molengang*), it was possible to drain the 4,5m deep Wormer lake and 3,5m deep Beemster lake. This latter area is now on the UNESCO list of World Heritage and is a perfect example of how the Dutch would further create and arrange large parts of their land themselves (*see illus. XXII*).

2.3.3 An agricultural revolution

In the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries agriculture, particularly in the drained maritime region, moved from being largely subsistence farming to production primarily for the market. Farmers began to concentrate on ways of farming that best suited the nature of their land and maximized profits. In Holland, this meant in the main specializing in dairy farming butter and cheese for the market. Being less labour-intensive, this mode of farming freed labour to move to find employment in the service sector in nearby villages, or to migrate to the towns. The latter were able to absorb this influx because of the more general growth of the urban economy in this period.

Urban growth and prosperity were in turn stimulated by the growing dominance of the Dutch in the trade with the Baltic region in rye and other bread grains. The import of cheap Baltic grain, transported by water to Amsterdam, allowed farmers to specialize in products that brought higher prices on both national and international urban markets. From Amsterdam, the grain was distributed to the other towns in Holland and to those areas of the countryside which were no longer producing bread grains for their own consumption. Grain also became an important part of Amsterdam's Europe-wide trading system: The Dutch town acted as a quasi-monopoly in the re-export of Baltic grain to western and southern Europe. This lucrative trade was made possible by water transport: by sea from the Baltic ports to Amsterdam, and from there by sea, river, or canal to markets in the rest of the Republic and further afield.

The market orientation of Dutch agriculture stimulated the development of quasi-urban activities and institutions in the larger villages, most notably in Holland, as farmers increasingly needed to buy in services that they had formerly provided for themselves. The transport sector grew (because of the increase in urban-rural trade) as well as the service sector in general, providing goods and various services to the surrounding farms. This expansion constituted a radical change to the rural social structure. The transformation of the Dutch countryside may have been driven by market forces but, without the ease of transport by water, the extent of the change would have been considerably less marked. The Dutch Golden Age was founded on water - or, rather, water transport.

2.3.4 Water as an ally

The defensive uses of water during the 80 Years' War were so important that it can be asserted with some confidence that without them the Dutch would never have achieved independence. This war was essentially a war of sieges, decided by the taking and losing of fortresses and fortified towns. The large-scale introduction of firearms in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had forced the development of new defensive systems: high curtain walls that were vulnerable to cannon-fire were replaced by the bastion-centred system of low thick walls protected by outworks. Defence by height was replaced by defence in breadth, and water-filled moats and rivers could play a vital part in keeping besiegers at a distance and hindering attacks. The Northern Netherlands with its numerous towns and abundance of water was well placed to exploit the new possibilities.

The Dutch found that the ruthless exploitation of water by cutting the dykes and flooding the area surrounding a besieged town or fortress, more than compensated for any weaknesses in the primary fortifications. The prime examples were the sieges of Haarlem and Leiden: the former fell to the Spanish, but only after a prolonged siege, while the latter held out until 3 October 1574, when it was relieved by rebel forces who reached Leiden by boat after a large part of southern Holland had been deliberately flooded. The high water table also meant that earthworks could be relatively quickly and easily thrown up at need. At the same time entrenchments dug by besiegers tended to be damp and vulnerable to flooding. Besides, the great rivers, the Rhine and the Meuse, have been seen as a vital barrier turning back the Spanish-Habsburg reconquest of the northern provinces of the Netherlands in the 1580s.

2.4 Warfare

War was one of the key determinants of Dutch success in the seventeenth century. Without victory against the Habsburg rulers there would have been no independent Dutch Republic and the Dutch commercial expansion both within Europe and in other parts of the world was underwritten by the large-scale deployment of military violence. However, there was also another way in which the Dutch benefitted from war: the manner in which the Dutch state organized its armed forces, though costly to society, allowed those with wealth and power to profit substantially both from the ways in which the army and navy were put to use, and from their upkeep.

Around the turn of the seventeenth century, the Dutch state proved it had managed to transform the motley bands of rebel troops into a professional army and navy that could challenge the Iberian adversary both on land and at sea. The creation of chartered companies for the East and West Indies with far-reaching prerogatives for waging war on their own behalf helped to carry the war across the oceans, to the detriment of the Spanish and Portuguese crowns, indigenous populations, and Dutch soldiers and sailors who died in high proportions in battle or as a result of tropical diseases. The social and human costs of the operations by the Dutch army, navy, and the chartered companies were considerable.

However, for those at the helm of Dutch society, the peculiar form of organization of the state and its armed forces also provided much room for private gain. The States General had a structural preference for arrangements in which private investors were involved directly in manufacturing arms, supplying the army and navy, providing short-term loans for troop payments, and carrying out other key logistical tasks. It unhesitatingly employed the army and navy to secure Dutch commercial interests. This combination made war into an instrument of and an important field for capital accumulation, tightly connected to the other main branches of the economy.

After the end of the Eighty Years' War in 1648, the Dutch continued to wage war on a large scale, largely outside their own territory. In the wars against Louis XIV's France in the final quarter of the seventeenth century and the first decade of the eighteenth, the Dutch army and navy reached their peak in size. With immense fortunes running through the wheels of war, and up to 10 per cent of the labouring population employed in some form of military labour or subsidiary tasks.

2.5 Political culture

The body politic of the Dutch Republic was a multi-faceted entity, with local, regional, national, and global dimensions. The political culture of the Dutch Republic and the mentality of its citizens were rooted in the medieval history of the Low Countries, in which the provinces (and cities) were relatively independent and there was a high degree of local self-regulation. The Dutch revolt didn't really change this: even though the *binnenhof* in The Hague quickly became the most important political building for national and international politics, it wasn't the only place where national or international politics could be done. The Dutch Republic therefore didn't have a capital. Today, Amsterdam is the official capital of the unitary state of The Netherlands, even though all of the Dutch national politics are practised in The Hague. The Dutch Revolt brought however a powerful common ideology of religious freedom and representative institutions. Furthermore, the political culture was rooted in the global experiment, in which trading companies had to define their relationship with foreign rulers.

As a whole, the body politic of the Dutch Republic was marked by complexity and paradox. Although local and provincial independence was hailed, there was also a strong sense of national loyalty in the face of international crises. Although there was a joint effort to expand outside Europe, the Dutch empire remained a chequered phenomenon. Although there was a complex formal constitutional structure, there was also an important informal circuit. There were rival conceptions of national identity, and rival interpretations of the locus of sovereignty.

Nowadays, the Dutch body politic is instead hailed for its pragmatic, flexible, and conflict-avoiding institutions and decision-making mechanisms. This complex and paradoxical nature of the Dutch Republic has been the subject of fierce debates by its citizens in the past, as well as by later historians. Rather than validating one interpretation over another, it seems prudent to appreciate the identity of the Dutch Republic as fluent and multi-faceted, as continuously discursively shaped and reshaped. The engraving '*'s Lands Welvaren* (1613) (see *illus. XXIII*), meaning "Prosperity of the country" and showing various ships in the port of Amsterdam carrying flags of a province or a city, or the national tricolour, captures this constructed and multi-faceted identity of the Dutch Republic in all its complexity as it tries to relay an image of combined strength and prosperity through unity.

2.6 Global trade and colonies

During the 16th century the spice trade was extremely lucrative, but the Portuguese Empire had a stranglehold on the source of the spices: Indonesia. The Dutch merchants would buy all of their spice in Lisbon, import it via Antwerp and resell it throughout Europe. After the Fall of Antwerp in 1585 and the harbour blockade, many Antwerp merchants moved to Zeeland and Holland. Since 1580, Spain was in a dynastic union with Portugal and the Dutch, at war with Spain, were forced to find a route to the East Indies as the ports on the Iberian peninsula were closed to them.

In 1594, the *Compagnie van Verre* ("Company of Far Lands") was founded by 9 nine merchants from Amsterdam. On 2 April 1595 their first fleet, consisting of three heavily armed ships and a pinnace, set off from Texel, with 248 officers and men on board. The *Eerste Schipvaart* (First Maritime Expedition) followed the routes described by Jan Huygen van Linschoten, young man who spent five years in Goa (India) in the service of the local Portuguese archbishop. Van Linschoten had returned to Holland in 1592 and published books about his voyages with secret Portuguese maps of the Indies. These books, including the in 1596 published "Itinerario", would be very important during Dutch and English expeditions by the VOC and the EIC.

2.6.1 The founding of the VOC

Within a decade of *Itinerario's* appearance, the Dutch had replaced the Portuguese as the leading European mercantile contingent in Asia. While the *Eerste Schipvaart* was characterized by diplomatic mishaps, leadership struggles, and misfortune, the *Tweede Schipvaart* (Second Maritime Expedition) returned from the East Indies in 1599 with a rich cargo of pepper, nutmeg, mace, and cloves. In the subsequent three years, more Dutch than Portuguese ships rounded the Cape of Good Hope, reflecting not only rapid expansion and continuing profits but also increasing competition between merchants and investors from the Dutch Republic, who had created twelve competing *voorcompañieën*. In order to channel Dutch interest in Asia, the States General in 1602 decided to establish the *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC), the world's first joint-stock company. Led by a board of seventeen directors, the *Heeren XVII*, and supported militarily by the federal government, the VOC Company quickly succeeded in ousting the Portuguese from the Moluccas to obtain a monopoly in fine spices, for which there was great demand in Europe.

Institutionally, the VOC reflected both the federal set-up of the emerging Dutch Republic and the mercantile pre-dominance within the federation of the maritime provinces Holland and Zeeland. The *Heeren XVII* consisted of representative merchants from the VOC's six constituent chambers, located in cities where previously *voorcompañieën* had been established: eight were from Amsterdam, four from Middelburg, and one each from the four smaller chambers—Rotterdam, Delft, Hoorn, and Enkhuizen. The seventeenth director was appointed in turn by one of the four small chambers, thus ensuring that the Amsterdam elite could not impose its will on the others. Investments and revenues were divided accordingly. Each chamber had considerable autonomy, with its own capital and its own ships.

In 1619, VOC administrators founded Batavia, on the island of Java, as its headquarters in Asia. Under the accomplished yet occasionally ruthless leadership of Governor-General¹¹ Jan Pieterszoon Coen, the Company extended its monopoly in spices throughout the Moluccas, safeguarded Batavia against attacks from local rulers, and used its strong position in the archipelago as the vantage point from which to establish *factorijen* (trading posts) across the Indian Ocean littoral. By the early 1640s, the VOC trade network extended from Gamron (Persia), Surat (India), and Ceylon (Sri Lanka), along the Coromandel coast to Bengal and further east to Siam (Thailand), Formosa (Taiwan), and the artificial island Deshima in Nagasaki Bay (see *illus. XXIV*). Here the Dutch enjoyed exclusive access to Japanese commodities for more than two centuries. In this myriad of different cultures, the Company skillfully navigated between its bullish ambitions as a trading company and its more awkward role as an unofficial diplomatic actor.

¹¹ The by the VOC appointed Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies represented Dutch rule in the Dutch East Indies.

2.6.2 The founding of the WIC

In the wake of seemingly unlimited success in Asia, the *Geoctreerde West-Indische Compagnie* (WIC) was founded in 1621, after the Twelve Years' Truce. The company received from the States General the exclusive right within the Republic to trade and shipping in the *octrooigebied* (patent area) between two meridians established by the States General. The western border was the meridian through the eastern tip of New Guinea and the eastern border that of the Cape of Good Hope.

Institutionally, the WIC mirrored the VOC. A board of nineteen directors, the *Heeren XIX*, was made up of representatives from Amsterdam (eight), Zeeland (four), the northern quarter (two: Hoorn and Enkhuizen), and the Meuse (two: Rotterdam and Dordrecht), and further expanded by a regional chamber in Groningen (two). One director represented the States General, evidence of the 'national' importance of a company that was explicitly designed to enter into military conflict with Habsburg America. Unlike the VOC, a company run by merchants that could violently expand its colonial trade empire, the WIC needed permission of the States-General to deploy military personnel.

In comparison to the VOC, historians have traditionally regarded the WIC as a costly failure. However, the WIC's first campaign against Habsburg Brazil in 1624 was a resounding success, culminating in the conquest of Salvador de Bahia, the colonial capital, and the capture of the Portuguese governor and the provincial of the Jesuit order. It required the largest-yet Iberian armada to cross the Atlantic Ocean to recapture Salvador from the Dutch the following year. Spurred on by the successful Dutch capture of the New Spain treasure fleet at Matanzas Bay, Cuba, in September 1628, the WIC invaded Brazil for a second time in 1630. Dutch Brazil, reaching from Sergipe in the south and Maranhão in the north, would be the centre of a flourishing Atlantic empire for more than two decades. The WIC supplied the sugar plantations of Pernambuco with slaves from Elmina (Ghana) and the great slave station of São Paulo de Luanda (Angola), taken from the Portuguese in 1637 and 1641 respectively. A well-functioning triangle of Atlantic trade briefly resembled the intra-Asian trade network of the VOC (*see illus. XXV*).

Meanwhile in North America, the WIC had given permission to a number of private investors in New Netherland to obtain patronage, which gave the patrons the right to found and manage a colony. New Netherland, which claimed the territories between Cape Cod in the North and the Delmarva Peninsula in the South, was conceived by the WIC in 1621 to capitalize on the North American fur trade. The capital of this territory was New Amsterdam, today known as New York City, named after the English city of York. New Netherland was ceded to England in 1667.

Dutch Brazil collapsed as quickly as it had emerged. The planters' revolt of 1645 sparked an extended war that the WIC narrowly lost. Bitter feuding at home about the maintenance of the Company monopoly catalysed military defeat and eroded popular support for another attempt to build an Atlantic empire. The WIC scaled down its ambitions to 'expansion without empire', with lasting settlements only on the Gold Coast of West Africa, in Suriname (taken from the English in 1667), on the Wild Coast of the Eastern Cape, and in the Lesser Antilles.

3 The Netherlands today

3.1 The downfall of the Dutch Republic

3.1.1 The decline of the Dutch Empire

The Eighty Years' War between Spain and the Dutch Republic ended on May 15, 1648 with the Peace of Munster: the Republic was now formally recognized by Spain as a sovereign state, 60 years after the Deduction of Vrancken. The Dutch Republic had become a formidable commercial, financial, and naval power. However, this peaceful state proved to be temporary, as the Dutch trade business was attracting the attention of England and France. The period from 1650 to the Peace of Utrecht (1713) was one of shifting alliances and a series of military conflicts with other European powers.

The Spanish power had weakened at the end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648 which meant that many colonial possessions of the Portuguese and Spanish empire were open to conquest by another, stronger power. By this time, the Dutch had built by far the largest mercantile fleet in Europe, with more ships than all the other states combined. Realizing that the Dutch Republic was a serious concurrent in the fight for these economically interesting territories, the English parliament passed the first of the Navigation Acts in 1651. It prohibited that non-English ships to transport goods from outside Europe to England. This was disastrous for the lucrative Dutch trade between England and its Caribbean colonies, and led directly to the outbreak of hostilities between the two former allies (who had been fighting together against the Spanish during the Eighty Year's War). Three Anglo-Dutch Wars, that would last on and off for two decades, slowly eroded Dutch naval power to England's benefit.

In 1662, the Ming dynasty (China) took over Dutch Formosa (today: Taiwan). Under the Treaty of Breda (1667), New Netherland was ceded to England in exchange for the English settlements in Suriname, which had been conquered by Dutch forces earlier that year. Though the Dutch would again take New Netherland in 1673, during the Third Anglo-Dutch War, it was returned to England the following year, thereby ending Dutch rule in continental North America, but leaving behind a large Dutch community under English rule that persisted with its language, church and customs until the mid-18th century. In 1672, also known as the *Rampjaar* (Disaster Year), France invaded the Dutch Republic while it was fighting the third Anglo-Dutch War at sea. Even though the Dutch position had stabilised, the glorious Dutch Golden Age would be over.

3.1.2 The French revolution

By 1782, inspired by the American Revolution and the Enlightenment, a new movement of patriots emerged in the Dutch Republic. They found that the government of the country had to show responsibility towards the people and wanted more democratization in the administration. The patriots saw their cause as the continuation of the Dutch Revolt for more freedom - freedom that in their eyes was suppressed by the stadtholders. A stream of pamphlets and posters and mass demonstrations gave the patriots more and more followers which led to the establishment of *Exercitiegenootschappen*. These were private military organisations with a democratically chosen administration, aiming to train the citizens and the lower bourgeoisie in use of muskets. They caused, with or without force, reformations such as limiting the power of the stadtholder and establishing new city councils. The rise of the patriots created tension and violence between them and Orangists (pro-stadtholders) which led to an invasion from Frederick William II, the Prussian king and the stadtholder's brother-in-law. The Orangists had won.

In France, however, the French Revolution was more successful. In 1795, after defeating the Austrians in the Southern Netherlands, French soldiers entered the Republic, where they were received with great enthusiasm by the people. With this the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands came to an end and a new state was created: the Batavian Republic, a "sister-republic" of Napoleon. It would eventually become part of the French Empire in 1804.

3.2 The Netherlands today and its European integration

3.2.1 The relationship with Belgium

While the northern Netherlands were experiencing their Golden Age, the southern Netherlands continued as the Spanish Netherlands. The strict Catholic rule and the massive migration switch (progressive protestants and merchants went to the North while Catholics went to the South) meant that both parts experienced a very different history. It caused a rupture between North and South in a time that both just started to establish a kind of unity – at least a common culture - between their provinces.

This rupture didn't only partially cause the Belgian Revolution (and its independence) in 1830, shortly after the establishment of the (United) Kingdom of the Netherlands, it's also still visible today. Mick Matthys, a sociologist who grew up in Belgium, studied philosophy and social Pedagogy at the KU Leuven, changed his Belgian nationality for a Dutch one and worked as a professor at the University of Utrecht, published in 2018 a book entitled "*Waarom Belgen gelijk hebben en Nederlanders gelijk krijgen*" ("*Why Belgians are right and the Dutch are believed to be right*"). He interviewed sixty migrants (30 Dutch who moved to Belgium and 30 Belgians who moved to the Netherlands) who moved at least 5 years ago.

He concluded that, especially on a social(-economic) level, there are indeed enormous differences between the Dutch and Belgians. Although people in the Netherlands and present-day Flanders (the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium) speak (roughly) the same language, the entire Belgian culture is much closer to the French or Italian ones than to the Dutch one. This uniform Belgian culture often seems to be inexistent for many in this highly divided federation, but the differences between the French-speaking south and the Dutch-speaking north are much smaller compared to the differences with the Netherlands.

Matthys speaks of Dutch people who are straight to the point and very trade-oriented, compared to more modest Belgians who enjoy the good Burgundian lifestyle¹². In terms of communication, Belgians often only talk when they are sure that what they are saying is right. The Dutch, on the other hand, are more likely to give their opinion and come to a decision or conclusion together in a conversation. In the Netherlands, communication is used to participate and to profile yourself. In Belgium, it is mainly the intention to show your knowledge and otherwise to be quiet. As a Fleming myself, I can confirm this based on experiences I've had with Dutch friends and comparing class situations, for example: while in the Netherlands people choose fully for the debate, Belgians are generally much quieter. The same thing happens with friendships: the Dutch are easier and more open when it comes to making contacts and new friendships, while Belgians are generally more closed to strangers.

In general, it is about Dutch assertiveness and self-confidence. Selling themselves (even if what they do is not the best) to much more modest Belgians who sometimes even seem to have a problem of inferiority. History has certainly made it possible for the Dutch to build such self-confidence, but the self-confidence will have also been necessary to write this same history.

¹² In Belgium and in the south of the Netherlands, the expression "Burgundian lifestyle" is used to denote enjoyment of life, good food, and extravagant spectacle. It refers to the Burgundian rule in the Netherlands.

3.2.2 The *Afsluitdijk* and the Delta works

Since the successes in the battle against the water during the Golden Age, the Dutch have always sought to better regulate their water, be it coming from the sea or from its rivers. In 1886, it was investigated whether draining the *Zuiderzee* was feasible. In 1891, Lely designed the first plan for a dam that would turn the salty sea into a freshwater lake. After the flood of 1916 and the subsequent famine of 1918, the *Afsluitdijk* was a fact in 1933. Subsequently, the *Noordoostpolder* (460.05 km²) and the *Flevopolder* (970 km²), the largest artificial island in the world, were drained. In 2018, this area had about half a million inhabitants and a GDP of € 14.0bn.

Today, 40% of the Netherlands lies below sea level and a total of 60% of the Netherlands is vulnerable to flooding. To prevent this, the Netherlands has a total of 3,749 km of flood defenses such as dikes, dams, locks, weirs, pumping stations and flood barriers. After the North Sea flood of 1953, work was carried out between 1954 and 1997 on the Delta Works, consisting of 3 locks, 6 dams and 4 flood barriers. It was named the most prestigious hydraulic engineering project in the world and was named one of the seven modern wonders of the world. A Delta Commission and a Delta Fund (worth 1.2 billion euros per year) ensure that safety is guaranteed. In addition, the *waterschappen* spend another 250 million euros on water safety.

3.2.3 European Union

During the Second World War, on October 21, 1943, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg (the 3 states that roughly comprise the former Netherlands) signed a monetary agreement. A year later, the customs union “Benelux” was a fact. This union, which increasingly worked together in various areas, set an example of what was possible at an international level in terms of collaboration. The later European Union, of which the by the Netherlands co-founded ECSC is the predecessor, would take inspiration from the agreements concluded in this Benelux. Even today, this union still exists and ensures, for example, that the level of higher diplomas of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg are automatically recognized in the three countries.

Today, the Netherlands is a decentralized unitary state: the emphasis is on the central government located in The Hague while the provinces and municipalities have a number of limited powers. Belgium, on the other hand, has become a federal state after several state reforms. Although some powers are left to the central government, in daily life the local authorities (3 regions and 3 language communities) are the most important. Although the reasons and the divisions are different from then, this state structure is closer to the one of the former Dutch Republic. This decentralized administration and the often laborious partnerships show many similarities with the European Union.

CONCLUSION

The Dutch Republic emerged in a time when European monarchs were trying to bring as many areas as possible under their (preferably central) control through marriage, inheritance, redemption or war. The area in which the Dutch Republic emerged was strategically located between France and the Holy Roman Empire – the different counties, duchies, .. were in fact part of either France or the Holy Roman Empire – and had known a successful period in the late-middle ages. Not only was Flanders a very important economic and cultural centre during the Italian renaissance period, the northern part was also part of the Hanseatic League.

These economic successes had given these areas many independence which did not want to lose anymore, neither to a central Dutch rule, neither to a strange European monarch. The upcoming Protestantism and the strong contra reformation of the Catholic Monarchs made the rupture between them and the local rulers (the nobles), who the monarchs needed, even greater. The final (partly unplanned as no monarch could be found) establishment of the Dutch Republic wasn't easy and needed a lot of help from abroad but its success would prove that the people (together with their local nobles) could stand up against the monarchs.

Even though this republic wasn't as democratic and politically modern as they would become after the French Revolution, some Dutch saw themselves as the chosen people who could flourish in an economically and religiously liberal environment. Without a strong central government (respecting each other's independencies), they accomplished many things together – or at least by helping each other – both in their flooding delta area as in their Dutch Trade Empire. These accomplishments would inspire others and would pave the way to European modernity, even though a lot of time and changes were needed.

The accomplishments of the Dutch Golden Age are still visible today, especially when looking at the current-day Netherlands and Belgium. Not only in terms of society, but also in terms of internal politics. Furthermore, their common history showed later on (after the Second World War) the possibilities of international collaboration in the Benelux union. This union would turn out to be very important as it would function as an example for the later European Union.

In short, the Low Countries, with northern and central Belgium and the Netherlands still being one of the most urbanized areas in Europe, have known very important changes in the 16th and 17th century. These would not only change their own society, but would also pave the way to the emerge of more advanced modern states 2 centuries later.

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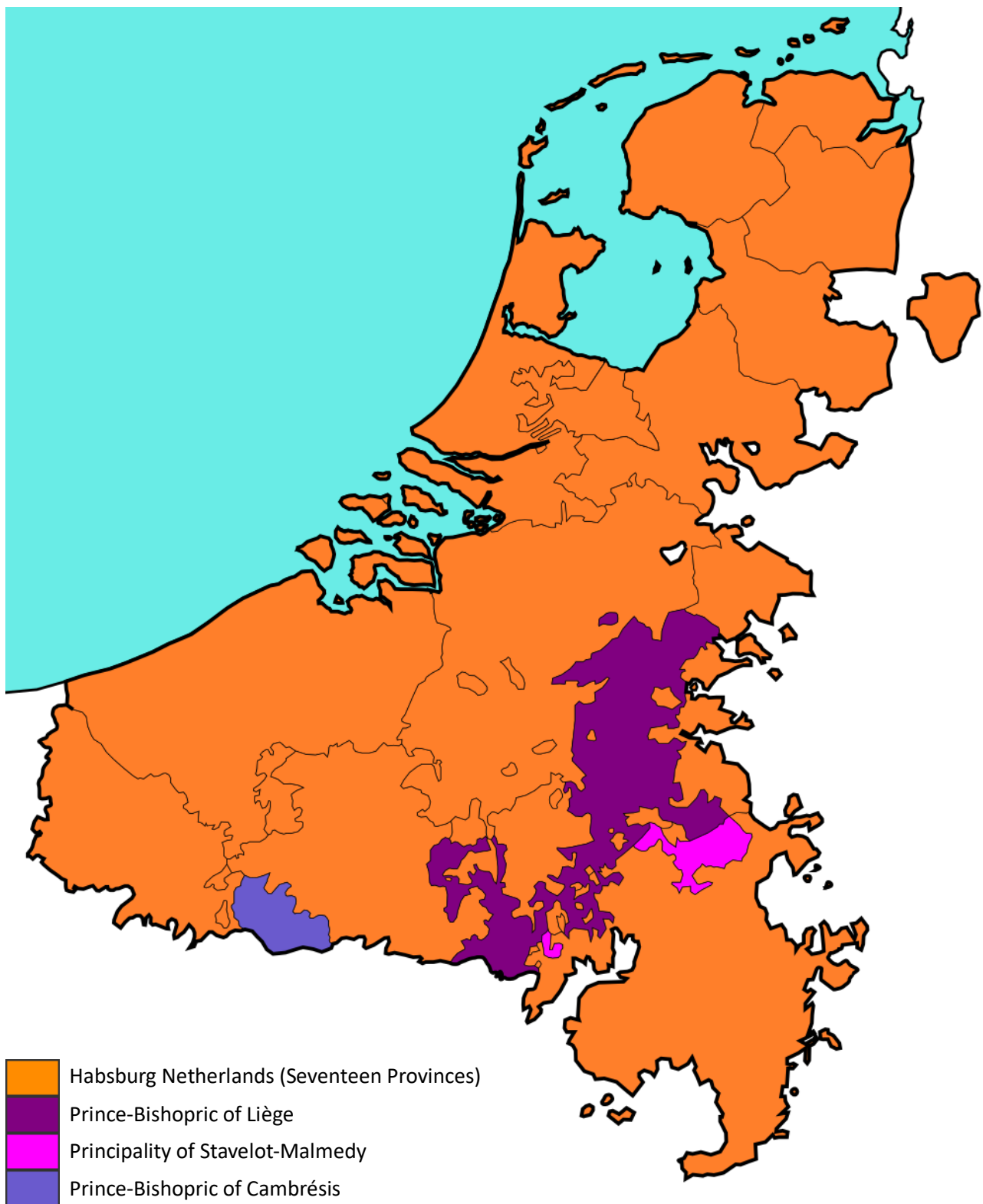
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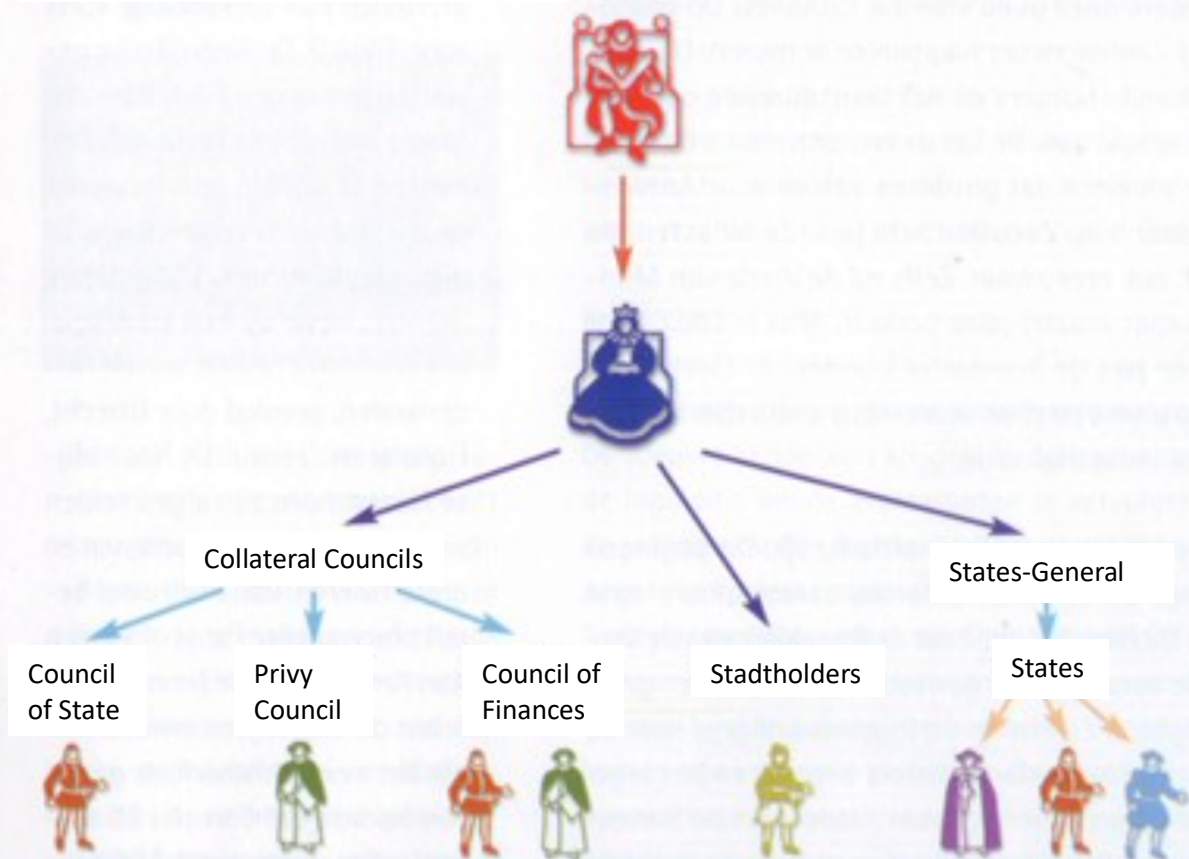


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Government in the Habsburg Netherlands



LEGENDE



Lord



Nobility



Stadtholders



Bourgeoisie



Governor

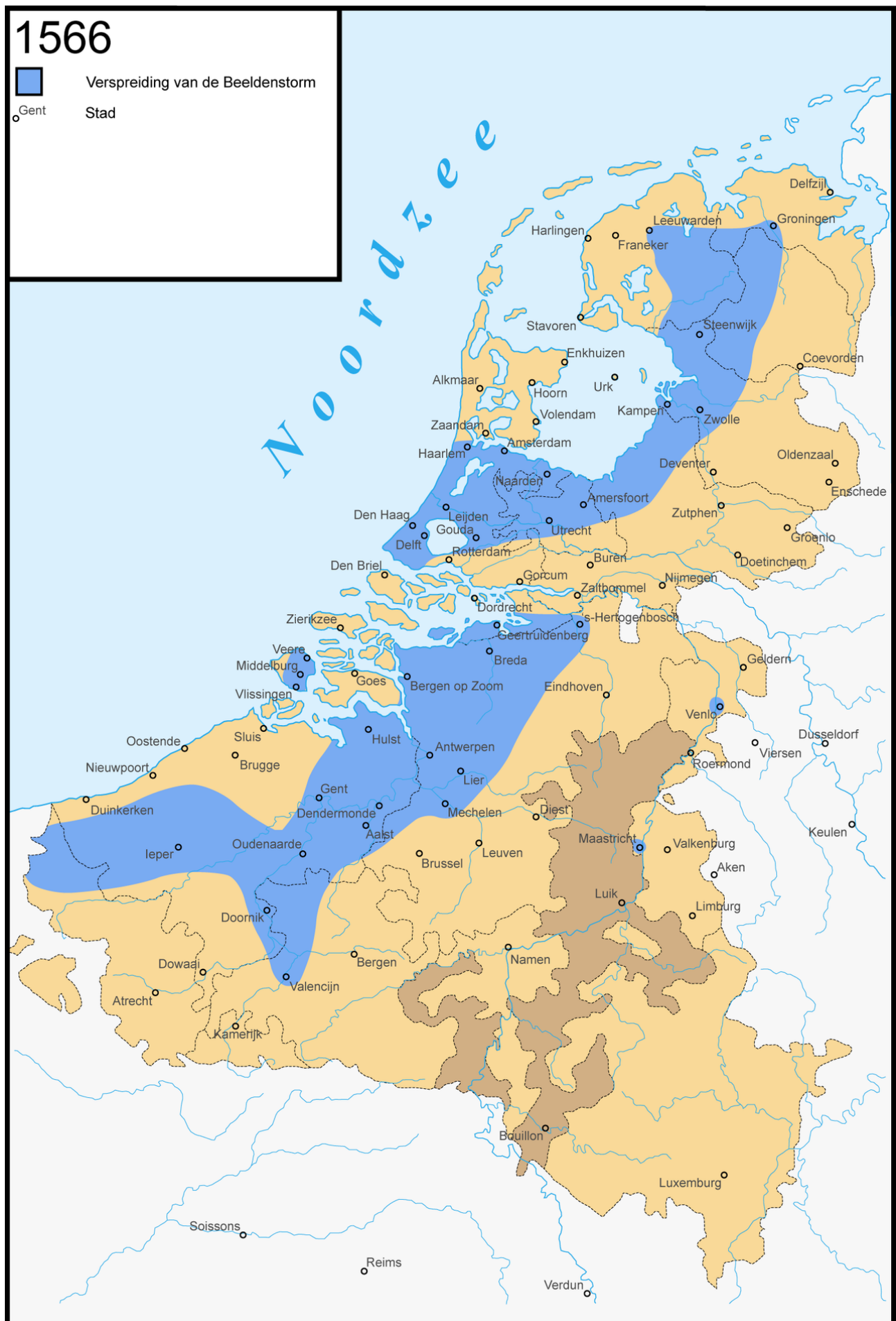


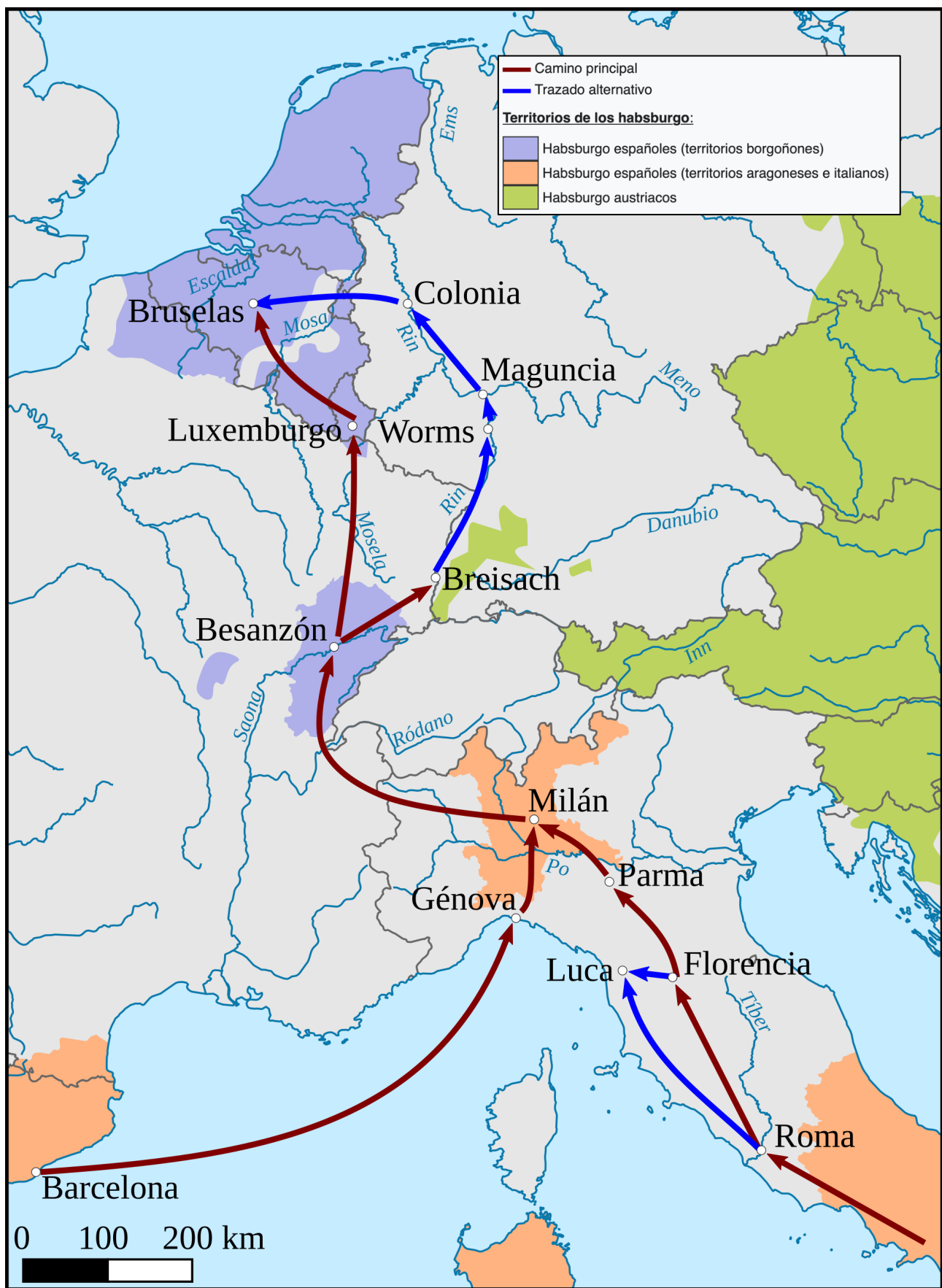
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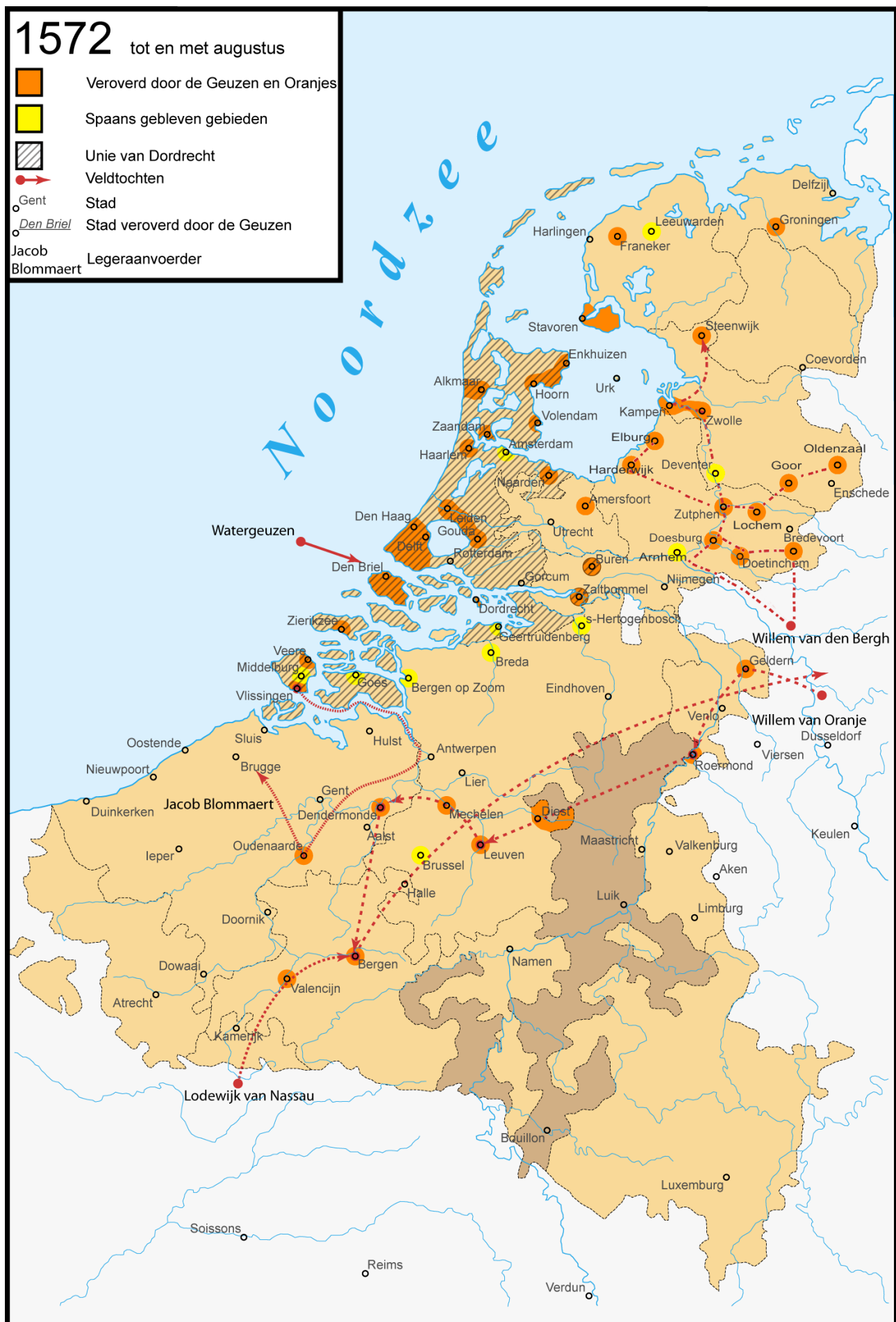
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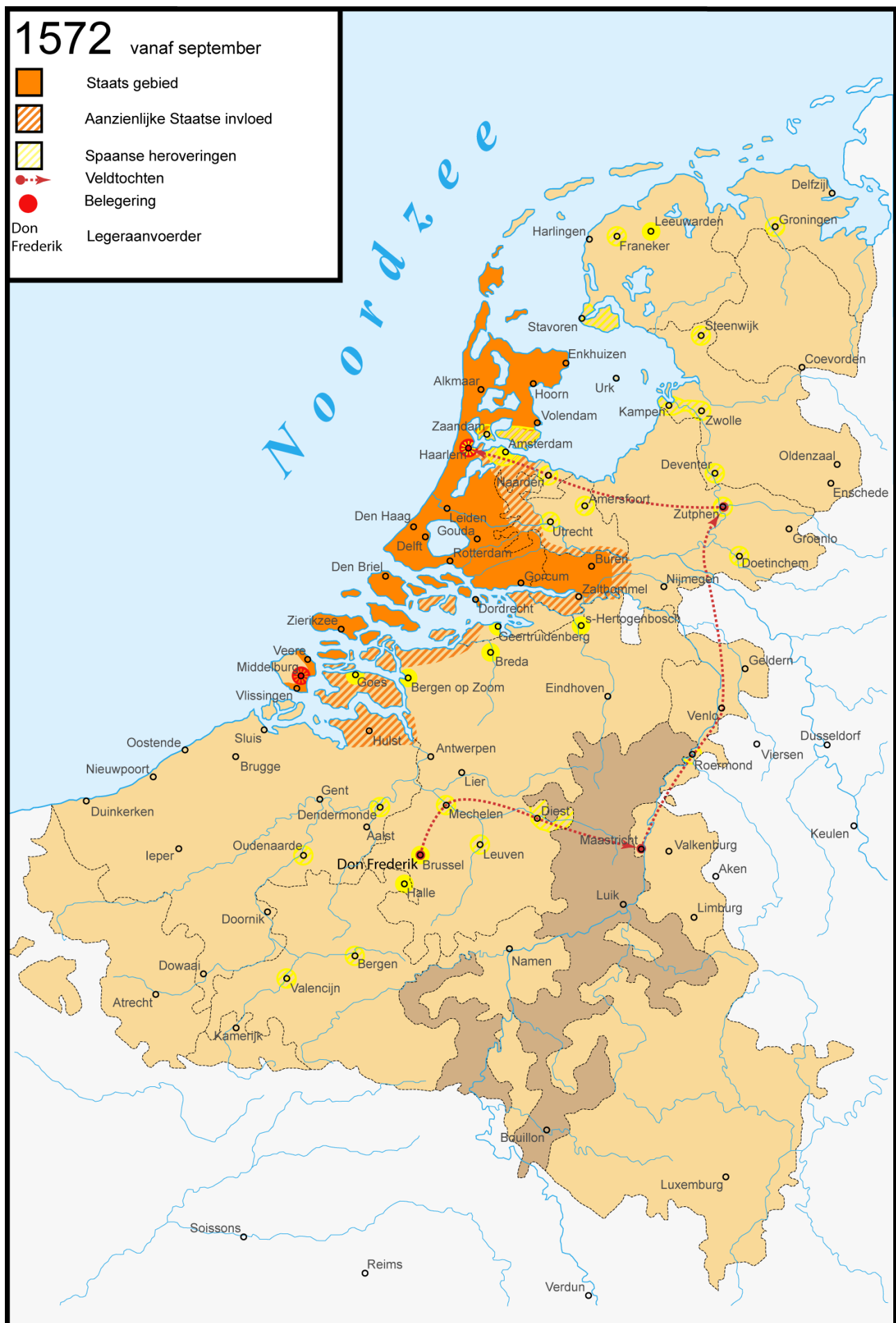
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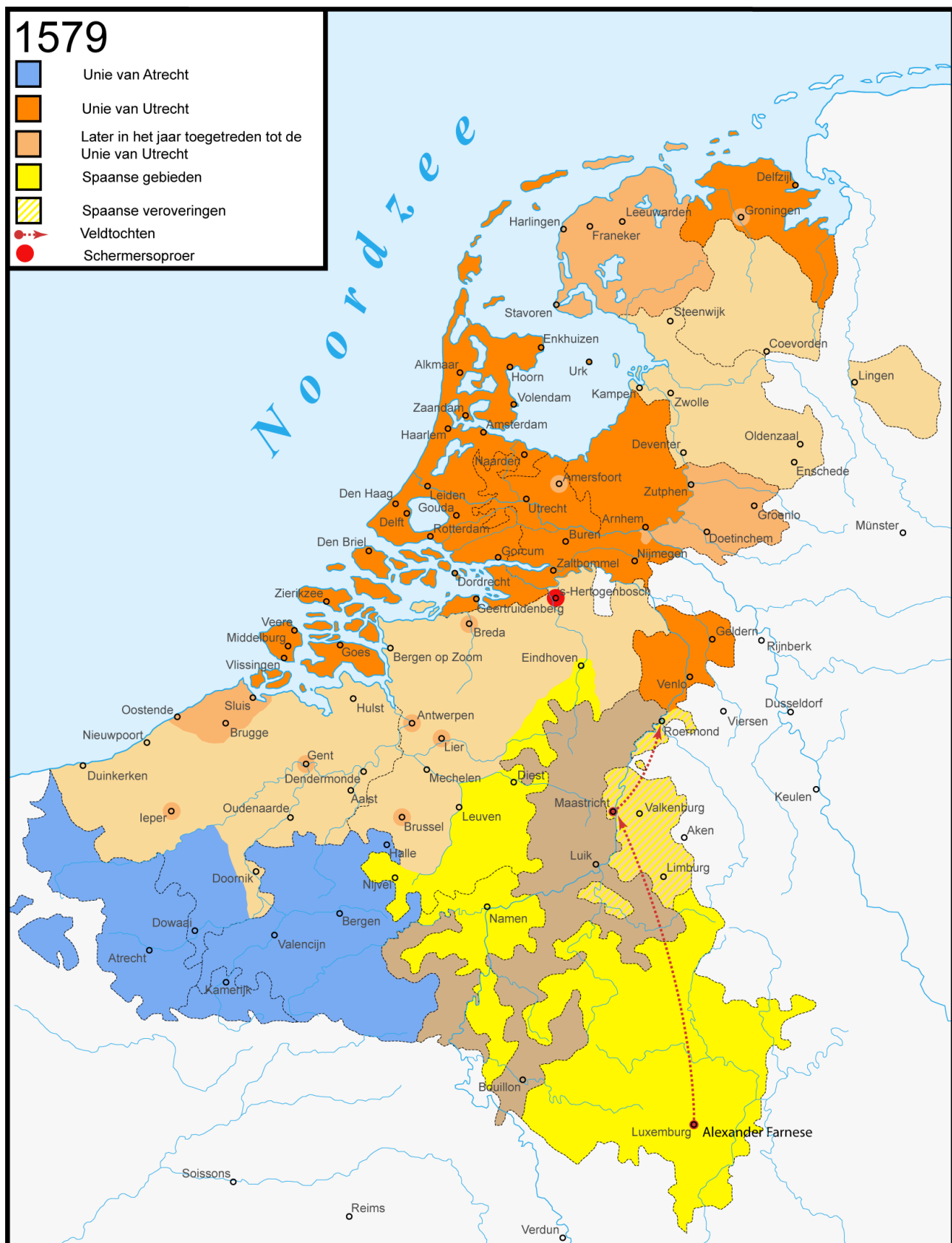


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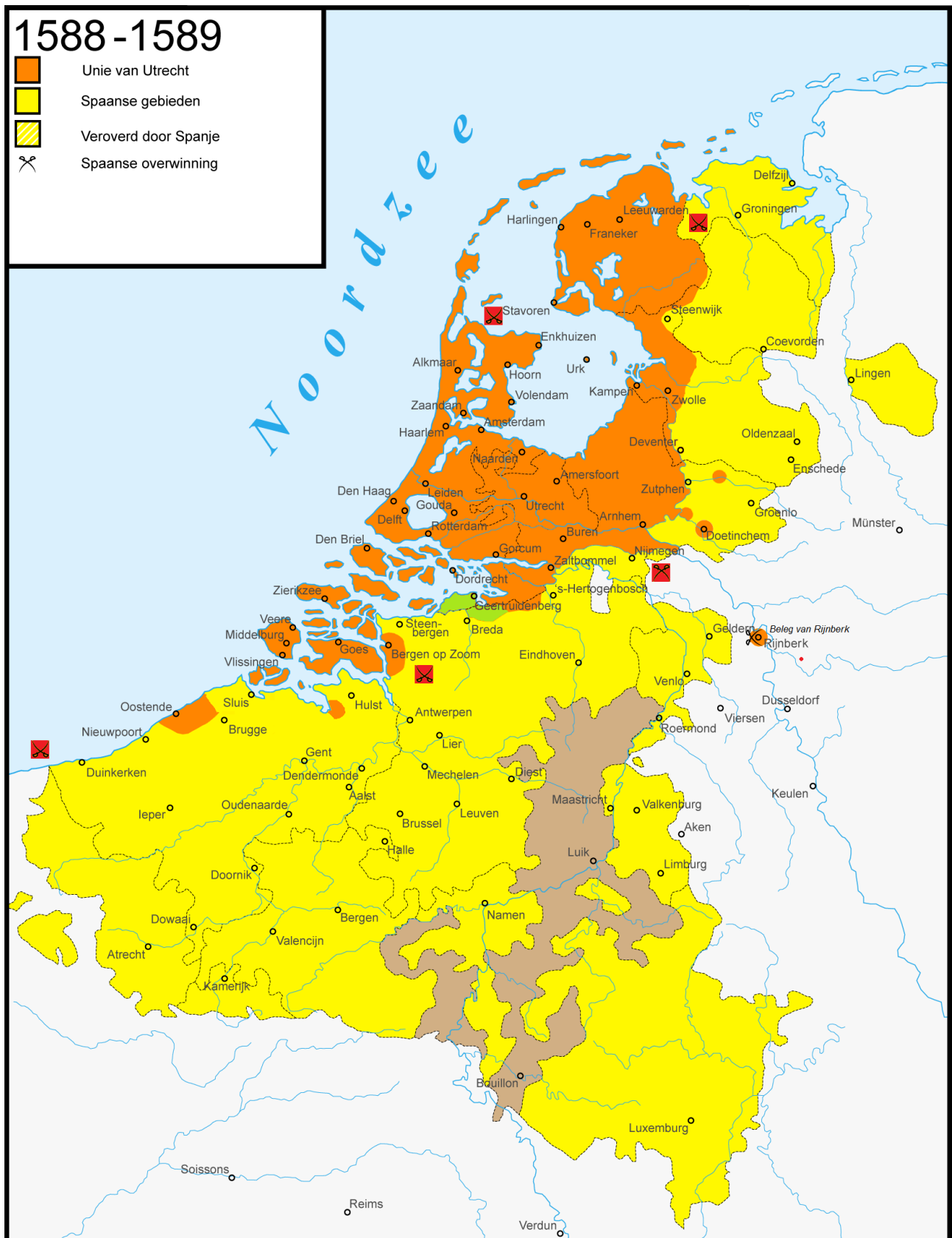




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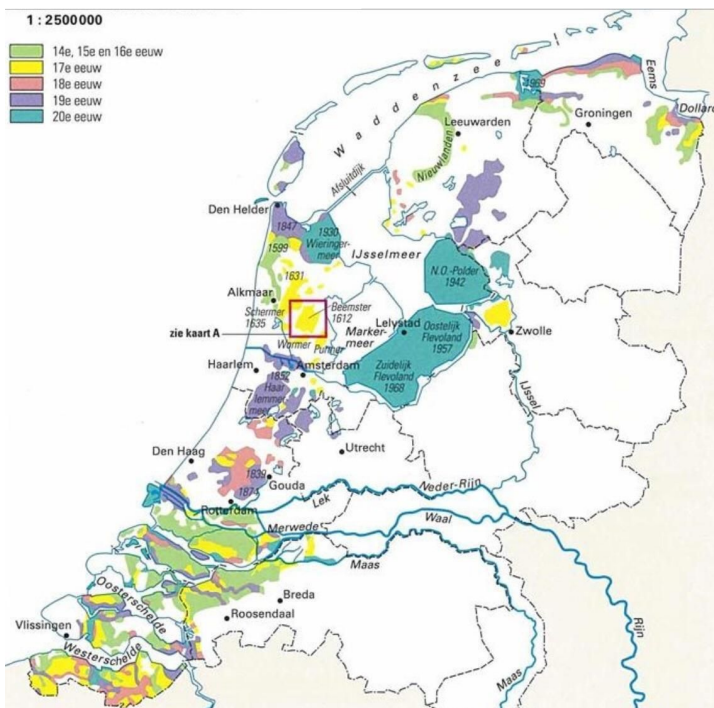
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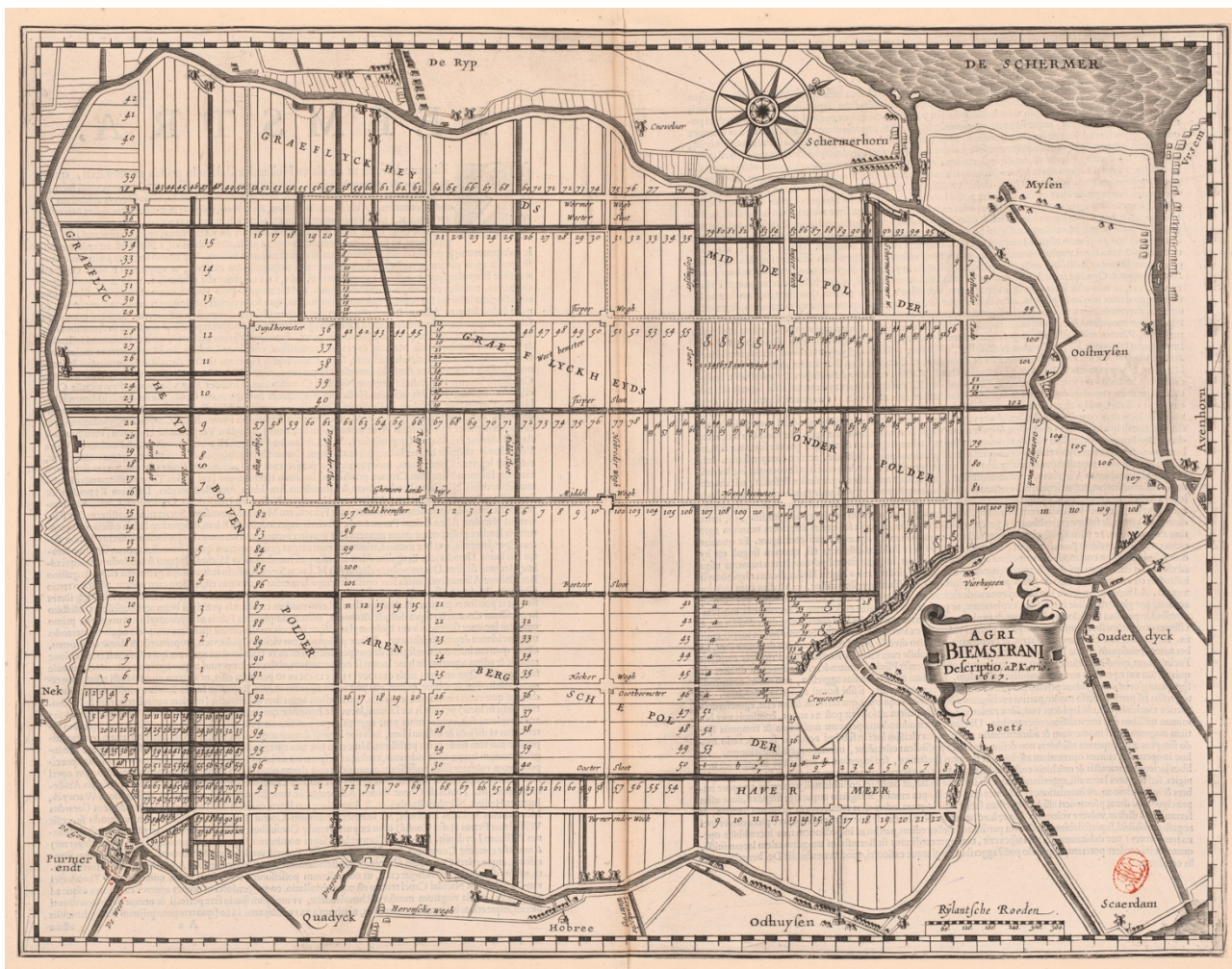
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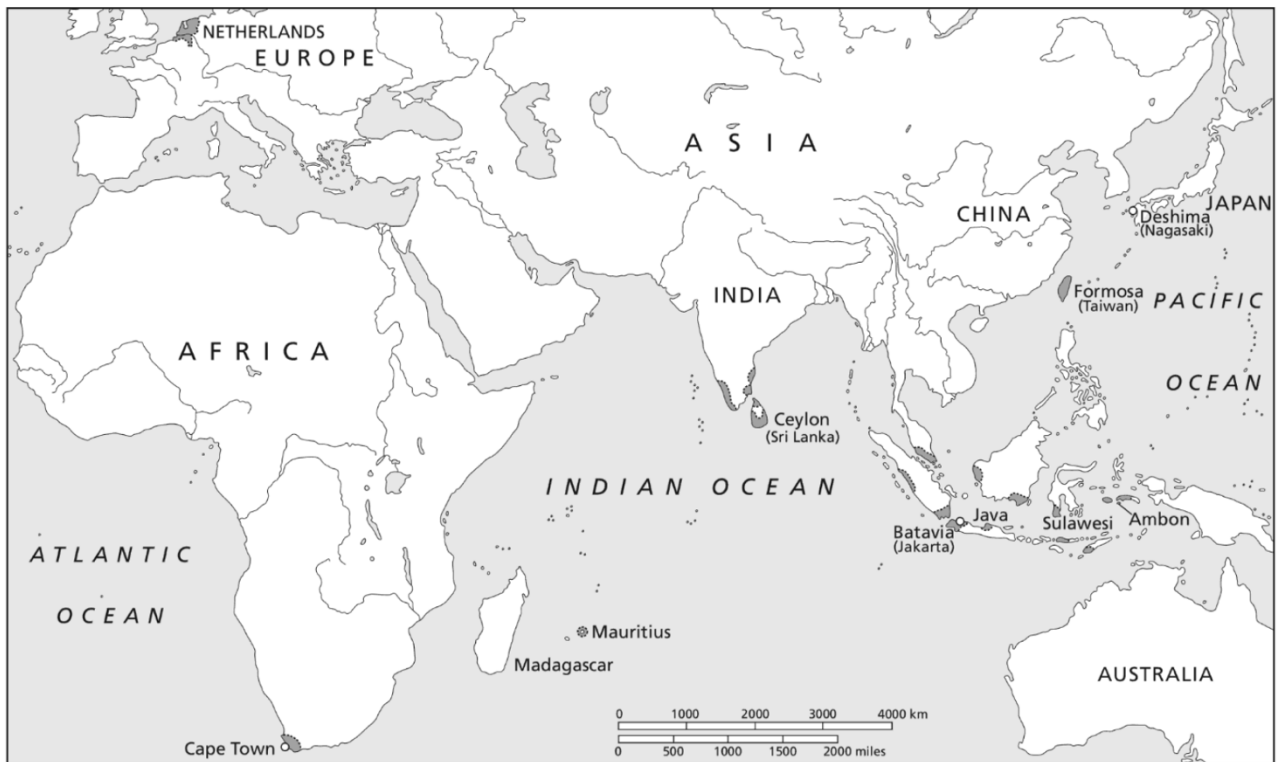
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